

Ms. KUSTER. Mr. Speaker, had I been present, I would have voted "NO" on rollcall No. 368.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Ms. WEXTON. Mr. Speaker, I regret that I was not able to be present for roll call votes 367 and 368 today. Had I been present, I would have voted "nay" on rollcall No. 367 and "nay" on rollcall No. 368.

U.S. SUPPLY CHAIN SECURITY
REVIEW ACT OF 2023

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the unfinished business is the question on suspending the rules and passing the bill (H.R. 3395) to direct the Chairman of the Federal Maritime Commission to seek to enter into an agreement with a federally funded research and development center to evaluate foreign ownership of marine terminals at the 15 largest United States container ports, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. JAMES) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

SOO LOCKS SECURITY AND
ECONOMIC REPORTING ACT OF 2023

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the unfinished business is the question on suspending the rules and passing the bill (H.R. 3399) to study the security of the Soo Locks and effects on the supply chain resulting from a malfunction or failure of the Soo Locks, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. JAMES) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, VET-
ERANS AFFAIRS, AND RELATED
AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS
ACT, 2024

GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. GRANGER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 4366, and that I may include tabular material on the same.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Texas?

There was no objection.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 614 and rule XVIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for the consideration of the bill, H.R. 4366.

The Chair appoints the gentleman from California (Mr. ISSA) to preside over the Committee of the Whole.

□ 1415

IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly, the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for the consideration of the bill (H.R. 4366) making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2024, and for other purposes, with Mr. ISSA in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The CHAIR. Pursuant to the rule, the bill is considered read the first time.

General debate shall be confined to the bill and shall not exceed 1 hour equally divided and controlled by the chair and the ranking minority member of the Committee on Appropriations, or their respective designees.

The gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. GRANGER) and the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. GRANGER).

Ms. GRANGER. Mr. Chair, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chair, I rise today in support of H.R. 4366, a bill that would provide funding for military construction and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

During the last Congress, \$3 trillion was spent outside of the normal appropriations process. As spending soared, so did inflation. There was damage done to the economy, and the work of the Appropriations Committee changed significantly over those 2 years. That is why, earlier this year, I asked subcommittee chairs to evaluate all of the funding in the pipeline.

When the President's budget finally arrived, I directed them to review each agency budget line by line. I thank the subcommittee chairs for their work to identify ways to save hard-earned tax dollars.

These savings have allowed us to reduce overall spending without short-changing—which is most important—national defense, homeland security, and veterans.

The bill before us demonstrates our commitment to reduce overall spending and still honor our commitment to our veterans. This bill makes good on that promise by fully funding veterans healthcare. It will ensure our veterans get the medical treatment and benefits they deserve.

Specifically, the bill prioritizes our Nation's heroes by providing critical funding for our military bases and facilities, improving the quality of life of our servicemembers and their families,

and ensuring our veterans are appropriately honored in our cemeteries and battle monuments. The bill also prohibits funding to be used for biased and controversial programs.

Mr. Chair, I thank the Members and staff on both sides of the aisle for their hard work. This is a strong bill, and I look forward to supporting it.

Mr. Chair, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chairman, I rise in strong opposition to H.R. 4366, with great respect to both of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, Chairwoman GRANGER and Chairman CARTER, who are friends but with whom we strongly disagree on this legislation.

The FY 2024 military construction, veterans affairs, and related agencies bill is, sadly, not one that I can support.

Back in May, the subcommittee mark of the MILCON-VA bill cut the Cost of War Toxic Exposures Fund by \$14.7 billion in 2024 and completely eliminated the toxic exposures fund in 2025, less than a year after we passed the bipartisan Honoring our PACT Act that promises dedicated funding for veterans of all wars exposed to Agent Orange, burn pits, and other toxic substances.

This was in addition to the default on America act introduced in April by Republicans, which included a \$2 billion rescission to immediately cut critical funding for VA and include no protections for veterans funding. We pushed back hard on these cuts as Democrats, and we were successful.

Thankfully, as part of the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023, President Biden was able to undo that grievous harm by delivering the promise we all collectively made to our veterans by fully funding the toxic exposures fund.

However, the problems did not stop there, and Democrats made significant efforts to right the other major wrongs in this bill, but, unfortunately, to no avail.

The MILCON-VA bill is traditionally one of the more bipartisan bills—actually, so often that it is almost indistinguishable who is in the majority and who wrote those bills.

That is not the case, sadly, this year because it is riddled with partisan riders, coming out of the full committee on a party-line vote significantly worse off than where it started. Riders include preventing VA from implementing its interim final rule that provides access to abortions for the life or health of the mother and in the case of rape or incest, as well as abortion counseling to provide healthcare services for women who desperately need it, and, importantly, to ensure that veterans have equal access to healthcare regardless of what State they live in because they get their healthcare from a Federal agency.

It includes riders that do everything from prohibiting VA from implementing diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives as well as training; prohibiting VA from flying the Pride flag over VA facilities; creating a license for people and organizations to discriminate against LGBTQI+ people under the guise of religious liberty and prevents the Federal Government from adequately responding; and prohibiting access to gender-affirming care, further disenfranchising veterans from VA.

VA is a place where all veterans should feel welcome, included, and cared for. All veterans means all veterans, and what this bill does is shameful.

On the MILCON side, this bill cuts funding for servicemembers and their families by \$1.5 billion compared to the enacted level, compared to current services.

The Republicans have cut military construction funding by \$1.5 billion compared to the current funding. In fact, this bill is \$200 million lower after the full committee markup than when it was first introduced in subcommittee. Even after the agreement with President Biden was signed into law, this bill cuts even more.

We have a recruitment and retention problem, Mr. Chairman, and this bill cuts funding for military construction.

We have major quality-of-life issues for our servicemembers, and this bill cuts funding for military construction and cuts funding for things like childcare centers, training centers, and airplane hangars that house and protect our billions of dollars of military equipment.

This bill cuts dedicated funding for PFAS forever chemicals remediation and cleanup, which is a cut of \$200 million from the current level, and dedicated funding for military installation climate change and resiliency projects, which is a cut of \$90 million from the current level.

There is an enormous need for funds to clean up PFAS forever chemicals contamination at BRAC sites as the services are still in the early stages of dealing with PFAS forever chemicals contamination.

Dedicated PFAS forever chemicals funding has previously been provided in this bill so we can ensure continued progress in remediating contamination at closed bases and minimize the impact for those surrounding communities. This is critical funding needed to fulfill our commitment to ensure those pieces of land are safe for future use and for people who live nearby. This is poison that Republicans are refusing to provide funding to clean up.

Furthermore, neglecting to continue investing in protecting our installations from climate change is a national security risk. We all know how extremely costly disaster assistance funding is. I am from Florida. I certainly know about that better than most.

Last year, we provided DOD with \$90 million, a comparatively small sum of funding now, which will pay huge dividends in the future and ensure our national security in the face of our changing climate. By eliminating the dedicated resilience funding this year, this bill would threaten future military readiness.

Cutting military construction by \$1.5 billion slows our historically bipartisan efforts to reduce the infrastructure backlog to strengthen our national security and to improve the quality of life of our servicemembers and their families. We are backtracking on our commitment to our servicemembers and their families.

To make matters worse, veterans rely on programs throughout the Federal Government, not just programs in this bill. Instead of honoring the bipartisan budget agreement that this Chamber voted into law just last month, the FY 2024 House appropriations bills collectively break the commitment that was negotiated, agreed to, passed by a majority of Congress, and signed into law by President Biden to adequately fund critical domestic investments. Instead, these bills are written to the same exact number used before negotiations even began.

These drastic cuts diminish access to education, transportation, job opportunities, and food assistance that veterans and their families rely on.

Is there no line that Republicans won't cross? Is there no population that is off-limits?

The MILCON-VA bill is just one piece of the puzzle, Mr. Chairman, and gutting all the other programs that veterans and their families rely on throughout the Federal Government breaks our promises to veterans and pulls the rug out from under those who served our country and whom we promised to take care of upon their return. I cannot and will not support it.

The House MILCON-VA bill, as well as all 11 other appropriations bills, are headed for a collision course with the Senate, which got to work in a bipartisan manner. By the way, their version of this bill passed unanimously out of full committee. They got to work in a bipartisan manner to complete appropriations bills on time, consistent with the Fiscal Responsibility Act.

These appropriations bills renege on the agreement and risk an automatic, across-the-board cut with a CR, toward which we are clearly headed—or, worse, toward a government shutdown.

I will follow, Mr. Chairman, one of the first tenets that I learned as a legislator many years ago: Your word is your bond. I will stand by our veterans and our servicemembers by opposing this bill that deprives them of the services, care, and quality of life that they have earned and deserve.

Mr. Chairman, I urge my colleagues to oppose this bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. GRANGER. Mr. Chair, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Texas

(Mr. CARTER), the chairman of the Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Mr. Chair, I am honored to present the fiscal year 2024 military construction, veterans affairs, and related agencies appropriations bill to the House today. This bill is special because it supports our troops and their families and the Nation's veterans.

The bill provides \$17.5 billion for military construction and family housing projects. This is less than the FY23 enacted amount. However, it is nearly \$800 million above the President's request.

We focus this investment in the Pacific to deter China's aggressive and coercive actions. We also provide significant funding for new barracks and child development centers.

The bill fully funds veterans programs at the level requested by the President. It keeps our promises to veterans, and we do more to help veterans in the Pacific. We also ensure taxpayer funds will be used appropriately and effectively by increasing oversight of several programs.

I thank my subcommittee ranking member. Although she disagrees with this bill, she has been a joy to work with, and our partnership has been good.

I thank all the people who have worked on this bill and all of their families and the families of the veterans.

Mr. Chair, I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 4366.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Chairman, I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from Connecticut (Ms. DELAURO), the ranking member of the House Appropriations Committee.

Ms. DELAURO. Mr. Chair, I rise today in opposition to the military construction and veterans affairs appropriations bill, which falls short of our commitments and backtracks on our promises to our veterans, our servicemembers, and their families.

This bill cuts funding for critical military construction by over \$1.5 billion compared to its current level. It is built on a house of cards that will crumble as this body and the American people come to realize the full scope of cuts the majority is pursuing.

This is not the only bill that supports programs and services that our veterans rely on. Republicans cannot credibly claim to fully fund veterans programs. The American people can clearly see how veterans are being treated when they look at the rest of the majority's domestic funding bills.

□ 1430

Make no mistake. If it were not for the Democrats, this bill would have decreased funding for veterans' medical care by \$2 billion. In addition to that, the funding for the Honoring our PACT Act would not have been there. In 2024, they were going to underfund it. For 2025, they completely eliminate it.

We should not be in this position, and the global economy should never have been used as a bargaining chip to extract cuts to domestic spending. However, to prevent a catastrophic default, the President reached a deal with the Republican Speaker to lift the debt ceiling and to set spending levels. We have a path to fund the United States Government on time, a path that this Congress agreed to on a bipartisan basis, and we ought to take that path.

Instead, this bill offers cuts to vital programs our veterans, servicemembers, and their families depend on. It cuts \$200 million in dedicated funding for PFAS remediation and cleanup. These chemicals do not easily break down in the environment. They are a source of groundwater contamination on military bases, which can lead to serious health problems. Failure to quickly clean up contaminated areas puts the surrounding communities, including military families and civilians, at risk.

This bill ignores the national security risk that will directly affect all of our bases at home and abroad—climate change. Additional dedicated funding for resilience projects is leaving America's servicemembers and veterans completely exposed in the line of fire.

Instead of responsibly funding our veterans in a bill palatable to both sides of the aisle, this bill is loaded up with hateful riders that have no business in appropriations language. Prohibitions on equity and inclusion programs and flags demonstrate grossly misplaced priorities, fighting culture wars, leaving our veterans, hard-working families, and the economy out to dry.

The bill places the Federal Government in the room with women and their doctors. By making it harder for veterans to access healthcare, we take a step closer toward a national abortion ban. Our veterans did not volunteer to serve this country and defend our freedom to have their freedom and their autonomy stripped by this Congress.

Mr. Chair, I urge my colleagues to oppose this bill.

The CHAIR. The gentleman from California (Mr. VALADAO) is recognized and controls the remaining 26 minutes.

Mr. VALADAO. Mr. Chair, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. ARRINGTON), the chairman of the Committee on the Budget, on which I have the honor of serving with him.

Mr. ARRINGTON. Mr. Chair, I am grateful to my appropriator colleagues for rightsizing the bureaucracy and reining in the wasteful and unnecessary spending after this government grew 40 percent during COVID. The taxpayers deserve fiduciaries who spend their money like it was our money. That is really the prevailing philosophy we should all embrace. I, again, commend the appropriators for the painstaking efforts to rein this in.

I support the bill, but I highlight in an amendment one of the most egre-

gious and largest wasteful spending categories, and that is improper payments. The Federal Government wastefully and fraudulently spends taxpayer money at an alarming rate. In 2021, it was almost \$300 billion. Last year, it was \$245 billion.

Mr. Chairman, that is money you could spend on a soldier or a sailor or on a safety net or infrastructure. It is going nowhere. It is larger than the Departments of Energy, Commerce, and Justice. It is a third of our defense spending.

The VA is not the only problem. It is pervasive. At the VA, there is a long-term care category that has an improper payment rate of 47 percent. Think about that. Almost 50 cents on every dollar is wasted in this program. It is unconscionable, Mr. Chairman.

If you look across the board, the earned income tax credit, 30 cents on every dollar wasted, \$18 billion. The Medicaid program wasted \$80 billion last year. The child tax credit wasted \$5 billion. The list goes on. If we are going to rein in spending, if we are going to save the country from a debt crisis, we have got to get our fiscal house in order and focus on improper payments. It is not right.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Chairman, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. LOIS FRANKEL), a fierce advocate for our communities' veterans and a member of the Appropriations Committee.

Ms. LOIS FRANKEL of Florida. Mr. Chair, well, my, my, my, here we go again. The Republican attacks on access to legal abortion never end. Today, the target is women veterans, women who left their loved ones, trained hard, sometimes risked their lives to stand up for our freedom, and now it is time to stand up for theirs.

All women should have the freedom to make their own personal decision about when or whether to start or grow a family. This bill would undermine the current Biden policy that allows VA medical centers to provide an abortion when the life or the health of the pregnant veteran is in danger.

Republicans are willing to force women to wait until they are on death's door to receive the healthcare that they need. Really? This is how we thank veterans for their service?

Mr. Chair, I urge my colleagues to vote "no" on this bill.

Mr. VALADAO. Mr. Chairman, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. CLINE), a member of the Appropriations Committee.

Mr. CLINE. Mr. Chairman, years of out-of-control government spending has fueled inflation and skyrocketed our Federal debt. It is far past time we prioritize those most important core functions of government as intended by our Founders in the Constitution.

The fiscal year 2024 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs bill does just that. It prioritizes programs for those most important: our Nation's veterans, and facilities for our men and women defending our country.

My, my, my, what do we hear from the other side? Complaints about not being able to fly certain flags at military bases, complaints about not being able to fund climate change bureaucracies in our veterans' facilities, complaints about actually not being able to use taxpayer dollars to fund abortion services.

This bill focuses on core government functions. It fully funds veterans' healthcare, veterans' benefits and VA programs. It ensures our veterans get the medical treatment and benefits they deserve. It provides funds to the agencies that ensure our military and veterans are appropriately honored in our cemeteries and battle monuments, and it prioritizes our Nation's Active Duty servicemembers and their families by providing nearly \$800 million above the President's budget request for military construction and family housing. Let me repeat that: \$800 million above the President's budget request.

We can and we must support our Nation's heroes who have sacrificed so much to defend our freedoms and protect our homeland. That is why we must pass this strong legislation and make clear that we stand with our brave men and women in uniform.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

The gentlemen from Tennessee and California understand what kind of money really matters here. It is very nice to say that you are \$800 million above the President's budget request.

The money that matters is where we are now and what Republicans are proposing to spend going forward. Republicans are cutting—which, of course, Mr. CLINE neglected to mention—military construction \$1.5 billion below what we spend now. That is a cut by anyone's definition. They can play games with the language and the way they describe things, but there is no getting around that they are cutting \$1.5 billion from military construction.

What does that mean? That might just sound like, oh, we will build a few less buildings, it is not going to be that bad. Understand that DOD has assessed that 30 percent of our military infrastructure around the world is in fair or poor condition. Many of us have traveled around the world to inspect military bases, and we talk to our troops and pledge to our servicemembers how much they mean to us and how we have their backs. I have had the opportunity to be shown places where our hangar doors are held together with wax and spit, particularly in places like Okinawa and other areas where there is a lot of erosion and metal rusts more quickly. I live in a coastal State, and I have a coastal district, so I understand what happens there when you are on the coast from the salt air. I watched a servicemember try to pull closed a hangar door that was jury-rigged with a coat hanger because they couldn't get the door closed the way it normally

should, and we did not provide them funding anywhere in the near future to ensure that we can keep billions of dollars' worth of military equipment safe.

Republicans are standing here and saying things that absolutely do not pass the straight-face test when they are trying to suggest that they are doing right by our servicemembers.

We have a retention problem in our military. We have people who have testified to the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Subcommittee who are current servicemembers who talked to us about how they intended to spend their careers in the service, but because of the way they and their families felt treated, the decrepit housing that the military can't seem to get straight when it comes to dealing with mold and broken items and repairs that are necessary, they chose a different career path.

If we continue on the path that Republicans have proposed, then what that means is that we are going to lose servicemembers, like we are already losing. That is irresponsible and unacceptable.

Mr. Chairman, I will have more to say at a later time. I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. VALADAO. Mr. Chair, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. GUEST), a member of the House Appropriations Committee.

Mr. GUEST. Mr. Chair, I rise today in support of H.R. 4366, the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act for FY 2024.

I am proud that this legislation fully funds programs to care for our Nation's heroes, and it ensures that our military infrastructure needs are met to address critical national security priorities. This bill focuses on the important work of these agencies while also preventing the radical woke policies of the Biden administration from distracting these departments from their primary responsibilities.

A recent example of these policies can be seen in my home State of Mississippi, where a VA facility chose to replace an American flag with an LGBTQ Pride flag.

The mission of the VA is to fulfill President Lincoln's promise, a promise to care for those who have served in our Nation's military, their families, their caregivers, and their survivors. The work and the message of the VA should not be divisive but, rather, respectful toward our veterans and consistent with the purpose for which the VA was created.

I am grateful that language is included in the bill to ensure that the only flags flown over VA facilities or national cemeteries are government, military, or POW/MIA flags.

Mr. Chair, I am proud to support this bill. We owe our veterans a debt of gratitude, not a political message.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Chairman, I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from Nevada (Ms. LEE), who

represents tens of thousands of military servicemembers as well as veterans and is an incredible advocate on their behalf.

Ms. LEE of Nevada. Mr. Chairman, I rise today as a Representative from southern Nevada, where we have Creech Air Force Base, Nellis Air Force Base, and hundreds of thousands of veterans that call southern Nevada home. As their Representative, I have extreme disappointment with this bill that we have before us, the MILCON-VA bill.

□ 1445

As a member of the Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies, I take great pride in our work. This traditionally has been bipartisan and laser-focused on the needs of our veterans, of our servicemembers, and their families, and on the military's construction requirements to meet global security challenges facing our Nation, not just today, but in the future.

Unfortunately, this bill is not a reflection of that MILCON-VA tradition of putting politics aside and putting our military, our servicemembers, our veterans, and our Nation first. Instead, this bill sacrifices our promises to veterans, our military readiness, and our national security, honestly, in favor of meeting the demands of a few extremist Republican politicians.

Instead of ensuring our Nation provides for Americans who have sacrificed to keep our Nation safe, this bill focuses on picking culture war fights, banning the VA from flying certain flags or banning them from taking steps to advance equal opportunity and health access for every veteran.

Instead of focusing on preparing our military to protect U.S. interests, the bill would prevent the VA from providing lifesaving reproductive healthcare to female veterans.

As my colleague just said, the mission of the VA should be respectful to our veterans. I say to every woman veteran who has put her life on the line for our freedom that we should show them the respect that they can make their own choice and be free to make their own choice for their own healthcare.

I want to be clear, as a woman who has undergone a D&C, that abortion care is healthcare. I will say that again. Abortion care is healthcare. Women who have put their lives on the line for our country, for our freedom, should have the ability to make that choice.

The policies that extremist politicians, in addition to that, have tacked on to this bill prevents the VA from providing that type of care, even in the case when a pregnancy is the result of rape, incest, or the life of the mother is at risk.

The CHAIR. The time of the gentlewoman has expired.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Chair, I yield such time as she may

consume to the gentlewoman from Nevada.

Ms. LEE of Nevada. Policies that extremist politicians have tacked on to this bill are offensive to men and women who serve our country, including my constituents at Creech and Nellis Air Force bases.

I am especially alarmed at the \$1.5 billion in proposed cuts to military construction. I am supportive of being thoughtful and responsible with our Federal spending, but at a time when our Nation faces mounting security challenges across this globe, I cannot understand how we can stand here today and cut nearly 10 percent of funding that would ensure that our military bases are fully equipped to handle global threats.

This bill would increase the backlog of projects at bases like Nellis and Creech, where I have heard directly from my airmen and airwomen working out of temporary, cramped, and outdated, unsafe facilities; and this, at a time when our military is already struggling with recruitment and retention.

Full military construction funding is key to enable that our servicemembers meet National Defense Strategy demands, so we must invest fully in critical facilities, like Nellis' communication support center and the Weapons School Campus.

We also need to support the mission-critical Reconnaissance Operations Training Facility and to repair the base's taxiway at Creech.

We call on our men and women in our military to make our Nation and keep our Nation safe, but this bill does not meet the demands of our servicemembers and, instead, abandons men and women who we should be supporting most in southern Nevada and beyond.

I urge my colleagues to vote "no" and, instead, please let's get back to working together to get servicemembers and our veterans the resources that they need, that they have earned, and give them the respect and the freedom that they have fought for.

The CHAIR. The gentleman from Texas (Mr. CARTER) is recognized and controls the time.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Mr. Chairman, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. RUTHERFORD), a member of the Appropriations Committee.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. I thank the gentleman, the chairman, for yielding.

Mr. Chair, I rise in support of this fiscal year 2024 military construction and veterans affairs appropriations bill.

Despite some of the allegations from my friends on the other side of the aisle, this is a good bill. The budget process is not about how much you cut; it is about where you cut. That is what is important.

This bill is a good bill because it supports our veterans and our servicemembers. In fact, this bill fully funds President Biden's request for the VA and even exceeds the administration's request for military construction.

On top of that, the VA funding in this bill is \$16.5 million more than the fiscal year 2023 enacted level—the enacted level. Let me repeat. This bill fully funds veterans' healthcare programs, period.

This includes keeping our promise that we just made to provide care to our toxic-exposed veterans, as we did last year through the Honoring our PACT Act.

I am also proud that we robustly funded military construction projects across the world, focusing on our barracks, our child development centers, to the tune of almost \$800 million more than the administration's request.

This bill cuts wasteful spending, wasteful spending for programs that my constituents back home do not support, like critical race theory and DEI.

Now, they want to say that we have politicized the issue of abortion within this bill. The fact of the matter is, President Biden's administration, through rulemaking in DOD, put in this language—that is why we are taking it out because they put it in—that they were going to use taxpayer dollars to actually facilitate someone getting an abortion.

That is not what the taxpayers want. That is not what the Hyde amendment allows, and the partisanship that they referred to earlier is their partisanship.

This administration and almost every executive agency in this government now legislates by fiat. They pass rules, 100-page rules. Those aren't rules. That is legislation. That is law. We have got to stop that, and we are doing that in this bill.

I am very proud that in this bill we prohibit the VA from continuing to implement their abortion policy that they put in; it is nothing more than this administration's way of circumventing the Dobbs decision.

House Republicans are delivering on our promise to care for the men and women who have served this Nation.

The CHAIR. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Mr. Chair, I yield an additional 1 minute to the gentleman from Florida.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. House Republicans, we are simply delivering on our promise to care for the men and women who serve this Nation.

I commend Chairwoman GRANGER and Chairman CARTER for having put this bill together in a fiscally responsible manner. Yes, we have made some cuts, but they were responsible cuts. They were cuts that needed to be made. We cut the waste so that we could help our men and women who serve this country in uniform. I urge support of this bill.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Chairman, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from Pennsylvania (Ms. DEAN).

Ms. DEAN of Pennsylvania. Mr. Chair, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding.

I rise in opposition to H.R. 4366.

PFAS contamination is in my district, as in everyone else's district across this Nation. In my case, it is largely as a result of the legacy of fire-fighting foam used at what was Willow Grove Naval Air Base. My own brother worked there.

PFAS contamination, we know, is extremely dangerous, and I will say those who produced these chemicals for six decades have known of their danger and hid it for many, many years.

The brave men and women of our military were disproportionately highly exposed to rates of PFAS. More than 700 military bases have been contaminated with PFAS. The servicemembers that call these bases work or home have been continually exposed to these forever chemicals, as have their neighbors in the surrounding area.

We are still learning more and more about the health effects from this level of toxin; decreased fertility, increased risk of cancers, obesity, thyroid hormone disruption, just to name a few.

Congress and the White House have a responsibility to protect our current and future servicemembers from these toxins, as well as their neighbors. That is why the FY23 appropriations bill included an additional \$200 million in dedicated funding for PFAS remediation and cleanup.

Unfortunately, this bill has no dedicated funding for PFAS and does not meet the President's funding request. Failing to address this widespread nationwide PFAS contamination on our military bases and the surrounding areas is failing our servicemembers.

Our military members stand up for us every single day. Today, we must stand up for them and all of our citizens by investing in PFAS research and remediation by rejecting this bill.

The Pennsylvania Constitution, article I, section 29, provides that we have a right to clean air, clean water, and the preservation of our natural aesthetic. Let's live up to that right.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Mr. Chair, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. ALLEN).

Mr. ALLEN. Mr. Chairman, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 4366, the fiscal year 2024 military construction and veteran affairs appropriations bill, which honors our veterans, supports our national security, and cuts wasteful government spending. I say again, it cuts wasteful government spending.

Last November, when the American people entrusted Republicans with the House majority, we made a commitment to a Nation that is safe. Today's legislation delivers on that commitment and ensures the Department of Defense has the resources and facilities it needs to protect our homeland from foreign adversaries.

H.R. 4366 provides nearly \$800 million above the President's budget for military construction, including \$80 million for the first phase of construction for the U.S. Army Cyber Center of Excellence Signal School at Fort Gordon.

Building a 21st century military is crucial to fielding threats in the ever-evolving cyber environment, and that starts with these critical investments being made at Fort Gordon.

Mr. Chairman, I urge a "yes" vote on H.R. 4366.

The CHAIR. The Chair would advise all Members we are in the Committee of the Whole.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Mr. Chair, I yield 1 minute to the gentlewoman from Georgia (Ms. GREENE).

Ms. GREENE of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, first I would like to acknowledge all the amazing women that serve in our Nation's military and the mothers that serve in our Nation's military.

But I will respond to something I heard a few minutes ago here, the pronouncement, the actual statement that abortion is women's healthcare.

I state for the record, abortion is not healthcare in any way. Abortion is the murder of the unborn child in a woman's womb. Abortion is defined as taking a life. It doesn't save a life. It kills a life.

Abortion methods are brutal, horrific, absolutely some of the worst things in today's times; ripping the limbs off an unborn baby, ripping its head off, killing it with chemicals inside of its mother's womb.

This is not something that taxpayers should have to ever pay for. This is something that honestly should not exist. Abortion is murder, and it is evil.

We should be supporting mothers in the military. We should be supporting women's actual healthcare, and that is not abortion.

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Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Chair, may I inquire as to the time remaining.

The Acting CHAIR (Mr. EDWARDS). The gentlewoman from Florida has 8 minutes remaining. The gentleman from Texas has 15 minutes remaining.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Chair, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Mr. Chair, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Chair, I am prepared to close, and I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Chair, as the expression goes: Show me your budget, and I will show you what my values are.

It is very clear with the lollipop tree of culture war riders that this bill that funds the quality of life and the national readiness and security of the United States of America and the protection and quality of life of our military servicemembers, it is clear that because this bill cuts \$1.5 billion below what we are currently funding in military construction, the Republicans have shown where their values are.

They can put all the lipstick on the pig that they have developed in this

bill that they want, but at the end of the day, they are still cutting \$1.5 billion from military construction. That is cutting funding for airport hangars, for training centers, for childcare centers, for infrastructure that ensures that we can keep our servicemembers safe when they are serving overseas, while they are serving in the United States, and that is something that we have not done in modern times in this bill.

Why? Because generally the military construction, veterans affairs, appropriations bill is, on a bipartisan basis, written as a commitment that we make to take care of our servicemembers while they are serving in the military on Active Duty and to take care of our veterans when they transition to retirement and spend the rest of their lives as veterans.

This committee has a special responsibility. We are the only committee in the Congress that is responsible for the entire life cycle of an individual from when they start their service on Active Duty all the way through Active Duty and through their life as a veteran. We have a special responsibility to make sure that we are taking care of them, and cutting \$1.5 billion is the opposite of that.

The values that our friends on the other side of the aisle have shown is very clear. What they were more interested in doing, and the priority that was at the top of their agenda, included riders that prevent all veterans from getting equal access to healthcare no matter where they live. What they want to do in this bill—and you will see in subsequent amendments that will be offered—is they want to take away women veterans' right, their ability to make their own reproductive healthcare decisions.

Furthermore, because veterans get their healthcare from the VA, it is essential that we do not discriminate against those veterans, those women veterans, no matter where they live; that they be able to get that access to healthcare whenever they need it to ensure that they can make their own reproductive healthcare decisions regardless of the State they live in.

We spent the bulk of our time in the subcommittee and the full committee debating riders that do everything from prohibiting VA from implementing diversity and equity policies so that all veterans, no matter their religion, their culture, their ethnicity, their sexual orientation, that all veterans are treated equally; that we can ensure that no one feels alienated when walking through the doors of the VA facility.

The Republicans zap any program, any policy related to treating veterans equally and making everyone feel welcome when they walk in that door.

It was a top priority for them to prohibit VA facilities from flying the Pride flag over VA's facilities. If that is one of their top priorities, it is no wonder that they are cutting a billion-

and-a-half dollars out of military construction, because our friends on the other side of the aisle have their policies backwards when it comes to taking care of the people who have served our country and continue to serve our country.

They have given a license to discriminate against people who are LGBTQIA+ under the guise of religious liberty. They are preventing the Federal Government from adequately responding to that and from VA to provide healthcare services to everyone equally, and they are prohibiting access to gender-affirming care, which no matter what you might like to believe on the other side of the aisle, there are people who have served our country who deserve those services.

All veterans should feel welcomed, included, and cared for. The fact that they are cutting funding for PFAS forever chemical cleanup means that we are going to be causing cancer and severe illness—which people are already getting by being exposed to these forever chemicals. We are going to ensure, because of the Republican values that are reflected in this bill, cutting funding for PFAS forever chemicals, we are going to ensure that more people who served our country and who live nearby facilities that need to be cleaned up from these chemicals get sick and eventually die. That is on them.

There is enormous need for more funding to help make sure that we can do right by our veterans. This bill does the opposite, and I stand in opposition to it. I urge all Members to join me in voting against this bill so that we can go back to the drawing board.

We will likely go back to the drawing board, I am quite sure, as this bill is on a crash course with the Senate bill which does a much better job at living up to the values that we all should adhere to, and that is taking care of people who have served our country and are serving our country nobly now.

Mr. Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Mr. Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. All time for general debate has expired.

Pursuant to the rule, the bill shall be considered for amendment under the 5-minute rule.

The bill shall be considered as read.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 4366

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the following sums are appropriated, out of any money in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2024, and for other purposes, namely:

TITLE I

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, ARMY

For acquisition, construction, installation, and equipment of temporary or permanent public works, military installations, facili-

ties, and real property for the Army as currently authorized by law, including personnel in the Army Corps of Engineers and other personal services necessary for the purposes of this appropriation, and for construction and operation of facilities in support of the functions of the Commander in Chief, \$1,517,455,000, to remain available until September 30, 2028: *Provided*, That, of this amount, not to exceed \$345,775,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, architect and engineer services, and host nation support, as authorized by law, unless the Secretary of the Army determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor: *Provided further*, That of the amount made available under this heading, \$162,900,000 shall be for the projects and activities, and in the amounts, specified in the table under the heading "Military Construction, Army" in the report accompanying this Act, in addition to amounts otherwise available for such purposes.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, NAVY AND MARINE CORPS

For acquisition, construction, installation, and equipment of temporary or permanent public works, naval installations, facilities, and real property for the Navy and Marine Corps as currently authorized by law, including personnel in the Naval Facilities Engineering Command and other personal services necessary for the purposes of this appropriation, \$4,477,961,000, to remain available until September 30, 2028: *Provided*, That, of this amount, not to exceed \$602,625,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Secretary of the Navy determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor: *Provided further*, That of the amount made available under this heading, \$52,683,000 shall be for the projects and activities, and in the amounts, specified in the table under the heading "Military Construction, Navy and Marine Corps" in the report accompanying this Act, in addition to amounts otherwise available for such purposes.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, AIR FORCE

For acquisition, construction, installation, and equipment of temporary or permanent public works, military installations, facilities, and real property for the Air Force as currently authorized by law, \$2,439,614,000, to remain available until September 30, 2028: *Provided*, That, of this amount, not to exceed \$450,614,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Secretary of the Air Force determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor: *Provided further*, That of the amount made available under this heading, \$30,300,000 shall be for the projects and activities, and in the amounts, specified in the table under the heading "Military Construction, Air Force" in the report accompanying this Act, in addition to amounts otherwise available for such purposes.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, DEFENSE-WIDE (INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

For acquisition, construction, installation, and equipment of temporary or permanent public works, installations, facilities, and real property for activities and agencies of the Department of Defense (other than the

military departments), as currently authorized by law, \$2,651,047,000, to remain available until September 30, 2028: *Provided*, That such amounts of this appropriation as may be determined by the Secretary of Defense may be transferred to such appropriations of the Department of Defense available for military construction or family housing as the Secretary may designate, to be merged with and to be available for the same purposes, and for the same time period, as the appropriation or fund to which transferred: *Provided further*, That, of the amount, not to exceed \$304,045,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Secretary of Defense determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

For construction, acquisition, expansion, rehabilitation, and conversion of facilities for the training and administration of the Army National Guard, and contributions therefor, as authorized by chapter 1803 of title 10, United States Code, and Military Construction Authorization Acts, \$369,261,000, to remain available until September 30, 2028: *Provided*, That, of the amount, not to exceed \$42,361,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Director of the Army National Guard determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor: *Provided further*, That of the amount made available under this heading, \$19,075,000 shall be for the projects and activities, and in the amounts, specified in the table under the heading "Military Construction, Army National Guard" in the report accompanying this Act, in addition to amounts otherwise available for such purposes.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, AIR NATIONAL GUARD

For construction, acquisition, expansion, rehabilitation, and conversion of facilities for the training and administration of the Air National Guard, and contributions therefor, as authorized by chapter 1803 of title 10, United States Code, and Military Construction Authorization Acts, \$189,322,000, to remain available until September 30, 2028: *Provided*, That, of the amount, not to exceed \$36,200,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Director of the Air National Guard determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor: *Provided further*, That of the amount made available under this heading, \$600,000 shall be for the projects and activities, and in the amounts, specified in the table under the heading "Military Construction, Air National Guard" in the report accompanying this Act, in addition to amounts otherwise available for such purposes.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, ARMY RESERVE

For construction, acquisition, expansion, rehabilitation, and conversion of facilities for the training and administration of the Army Reserve as authorized by chapter 1803 of title 10, United States Code, and Military Construction Authorization Acts, \$117,076,000, to remain available until September 30, 2028: *Provided*, That, of the

amount, not to exceed \$23,389,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Chief of the Army Reserve determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, NAVY RESERVE

For construction, acquisition, expansion, rehabilitation, and conversion of facilities for the training and administration of the reserve components of the Navy and Marine Corps as authorized by chapter 1803 of title 10, United States Code, and Military Construction Authorization Acts, \$61,291,000, to remain available until September 30, 2028: *Provided*, That, of the amount, not to exceed \$6,495,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Secretary of the Navy determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, AIR FORCE RESERVE

For construction, acquisition, expansion, rehabilitation, and conversion of facilities for the training and administration of the Air Force Reserve as authorized by chapter 1803 of title 10, United States Code, and Military Construction Authorization Acts, \$330,572,000, to remain available until September 30, 2028: *Provided*, That, of the amount, not to exceed \$12,146,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Chief of the Air Force Reserve determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor: *Provided further*, That of the amount made available under this heading, \$29,000,000 shall be for the projects and activities, and in the amounts, specified in the table under the heading "Military Construction, Air Force Reserve" in the report accompanying this Act, in addition to amounts otherwise available for such purposes.

NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION SECURITY INVESTMENT PROGRAM

For the United States share of the cost of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Security Investment Program for the acquisition and construction of military facilities and installations (including international military headquarters) and for related expenses for the collective defense of the North Atlantic Treaty Area as authorized by section 2806 of title 10, United States Code, and Military Construction Authorization Acts, \$293,434,000, to remain available until expended.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BASE CLOSURE ACCOUNT

For deposit into the Department of Defense Base Closure Account, established by section 2906(a) of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990 (10 U.S.C. 2687 note), \$539,174,000, to remain available until expended.

FAMILY HOUSING CONSTRUCTION, ARMY

For expenses of family housing for the Army for construction, including acquisition, replacement, addition, expansion, extension, and alteration, as authorized by law, \$304,895,000, to remain available until September 30, 2028.

FAMILY HOUSING OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE, ARMY

For expenses of family housing for the Army for operation and maintenance, includ-

ing debt payment, leasing, minor construction, principal and interest charges, and insurance premiums, as authorized by law, \$395,485,000.

FAMILY HOUSING CONSTRUCTION, NAVY AND MARINE CORPS

For expenses of family housing for the Navy and Marine Corps for construction, including acquisition, replacement, addition, expansion, extension, and alteration, as authorized by law, \$277,142,000, to remain available until September 30, 2028.

FAMILY HOUSING OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE, NAVY AND MARINE CORPS

For expenses of family housing for the Navy and Marine Corps for operation and maintenance, including debt payment, leasing, minor construction, principal and interest charges, and insurance premiums, as authorized by law, \$373,854,000.

FAMILY HOUSING CONSTRUCTION, AIR FORCE

For expenses of family housing for the Air Force for construction, including acquisition, replacement, addition, expansion, extension, and alteration, as authorized by law, \$237,097,000, to remain available until September 30, 2028.

FAMILY HOUSING OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE, AIR FORCE

For expenses of family housing for the Air Force for operation and maintenance, including debt payment, leasing, minor construction, principal and interest charges, and insurance premiums, as authorized by law, \$324,386,000.

FAMILY HOUSING OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE, DEFENSE-WIDE

For expenses of family housing for the activities and agencies of the Department of Defense (other than the military departments) for operation and maintenance, leasing, and minor construction, as authorized by law, \$50,785,000.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

FAMILY HOUSING IMPROVEMENT FUND

For the Department of Defense Family Housing Improvement Fund, \$6,611,000, to remain available until expended, for family housing initiatives undertaken pursuant to section 2883 of title 10, United States Code, providing alternative means of acquiring and improving military family housing and supporting facilities.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

MILITARY UNACCOMPANIED HOUSING IMPROVEMENT FUND

For the Department of Defense Military Unaccompanied Housing Improvement Fund, \$496,000, to remain available until expended, for unaccompanied housing initiatives undertaken pursuant to section 2883 of title 10, United States Code, providing alternative means of acquiring and improving military unaccompanied housing and supporting facilities.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISIONS

SEC. 101. None of the funds made available in this title shall be expended for payments under a cost-plus-a-fixed-fee contract for construction, where cost estimates exceed \$25,000, to be performed within the United States, except Alaska, without the specific approval in writing of the Secretary of Defense setting forth the reasons therefor.

SEC. 102. Funds made available in this title for construction shall be available for hire of passenger motor vehicles.

SEC. 103. Funds made available in this title for construction may be used for advances to the Federal Highway Administration, Department of Transportation, for the construction of access roads as authorized by section 210 of title 23, United States Code,

when projects authorized therein are certified as important to the national defense by the Secretary of Defense.

SEC. 104. None of the funds made available in this title may be used to begin construction of new bases in the United States for which specific appropriations have not been made.

SEC. 105. None of the funds made available in this title shall be used for purchase of land or land easements in excess of 100 percent of the value as determined by the Army Corps of Engineers or the Naval Facilities Engineering Command, except: (1) where there is a determination of value by a Federal court; (2) purchases negotiated by the Attorney General or the designee of the Attorney General; (3) where the estimated value is less than \$25,000; or (4) as otherwise determined by the Secretary of Defense to be in the public interest.

SEC. 106. None of the funds made available in this title shall be used to: (1) acquire land; (2) provide for site preparation; or (3) install utilities for any family housing, except housing for which funds have been made available in annual Acts making appropriations for military construction.

SEC. 107. None of the funds made available in this title for minor construction may be used to transfer or relocate any activity from one base or installation to another, without prior notification to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress.

SEC. 108. None of the funds made available in this title may be used for the procurement of steel for any construction project or activity for which American steel producers, fabricators, and manufacturers have been denied the opportunity to compete for such steel procurement.

SEC. 109. None of the funds available to the Department of Defense for military construction or family housing during the current fiscal year may be used to pay real property taxes in any foreign nation.

SEC. 110. None of the funds made available in this title may be used to initiate a new installation overseas without prior notification to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress.

SEC. 111. None of the funds made available in this title may be obligated for architect and engineer contracts estimated by the Government to exceed \$500,000 for projects to be accomplished in Japan, in any North Atlantic Treaty Organization member country, or in countries bordering the Arabian Gulf, unless such contracts are awarded to United States firms or United States firms in joint venture with host nation firms.

SEC. 112. None of the funds made available in this title for military construction in the United States territories and possessions in the Pacific and on Kwajalein Atoll, or in countries bordering the Arabian Gulf, may be used to award any contract estimated by the Government to exceed \$1,000,000 to a foreign contractor: *Provided*, That this section shall not be applicable to contract awards for which the lowest responsive and responsible bid of a United States contractor exceeds the lowest responsive and responsible bid of a foreign contractor by greater than 20 percent: *Provided further*, That this section shall not apply to contract awards for military construction on Kwajalein Atoll for which the lowest responsive and responsible bid is submitted by a Marshallese contractor.

SEC. 113. The Secretary of Defense shall inform the appropriate committees of both Houses of Congress, including the Committees on Appropriations, of plans and scope of any proposed military exercise involving United States personnel 30 days prior to its occurring, if amounts expended for construc-

tion, either temporary or permanent, are anticipated to exceed \$100,000.

SEC. 114. Funds appropriated to the Department of Defense for construction in prior years shall be available for construction authorized for each such military department by the authorizations enacted into law during the current session of Congress.

SEC. 115. For military construction or family housing projects that are being completed with funds otherwise expired or lapsed for obligation, expired or lapsed funds may be used to pay the cost of associated supervision, inspection, overhead, engineering and design on those projects and on subsequent claims, if any.

SEC. 116. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, any funds made available to a military department or defense agency for the construction of military projects may be obligated for a military construction project or contract, or for any portion of such a project or contract, at any time before the end of the fourth fiscal year after the fiscal year for which funds for such project were made available, if the funds obligated for such project: (1) are obligated from funds available for military construction projects; and (2) do not exceed the amount appropriated for such project, plus any amount by which the cost of such project is increased pursuant to law.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 117. Subject to 30 days prior notification, or 14 days for a notification provided in an electronic medium pursuant to sections 480 and 2883 of title 10, United States Code, to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress, such additional amounts as may be determined by the Secretary of Defense may be transferred to: (1) the Department of Defense Family Housing Improvement Fund from amounts appropriated for construction in "Family Housing" accounts, to be merged with and to be available for the same purposes and for the same period of time as amounts appropriated directly to the Fund; or (2) the Department of Defense Military Unaccompanied Housing Improvement Fund from amounts appropriated for construction of military unaccompanied housing in "Military Construction" accounts, to be merged with and to be available for the same purposes and for the same period of time as amounts appropriated directly to the Fund: *Provided*, That appropriations made available to the Funds shall be available to cover the costs, as defined in section 502(5) of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, of direct loans or loan guarantees issued by the Department of Defense pursuant to the provisions of subchapter IV of chapter 169 of title 10, United States Code, pertaining to alternative means of acquiring and improving military family housing, military unaccompanied housing, and supporting facilities.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 118. In addition to any other transfer authority available to the Department of Defense, amounts may be transferred from the Department of Defense Base Closure Account to the fund established by section 1013(d) of the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966 (42 U.S.C. 3374) to pay for expenses associated with the Homeowners Assistance Program incurred under 42 U.S.C. 3374(a)(1)(A). Any amounts transferred shall be merged with and be available for the same purposes and for the same time period as the fund to which transferred.

SEC. 119. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, funds made available in this title for operation and maintenance of family housing shall be the exclusive source of funds for repair and maintenance of all family housing units, including general or flag

officer quarters: *Provided*, That not more than \$15,000 per unit may be spent annually for the maintenance and repair of any general or flag officer quarters without 30 days prior notification, or 14 days for a notification provided in an electronic medium pursuant to sections 480 and 2883 of title 10, United States Code, to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress, except that an after-the-fact notification shall be submitted if the limitation is exceeded solely due to costs associated with environmental remediation that could not be reasonably anticipated at the time of the budget submission: *Provided further*, That the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) is to report annually to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress all operation and maintenance expenditures for each individual general or flag officer quarters for the prior fiscal year.

SEC. 120. Amounts contained in the Ford Island Improvement Account established by subsection (h) of section 2814 of title 10, United States Code, are appropriated and shall be available until expended for the purposes specified in subsection (i)(1) of such section or until transferred pursuant to subsection (i)(3) of such section.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 121. During the 5-year period after appropriations available in this Act to the Department of Defense for military construction and family housing operation and maintenance and construction have expired for obligation, upon a determination that such appropriations will not be necessary for the liquidation of obligations or for making authorized adjustments to such appropriations for obligations incurred during the period of availability of such appropriations, unobligated balances of such appropriations may be transferred into the appropriation "Foreign Currency Fluctuations, Construction, Defense", to be merged with and to be available for the same time period and for the same purposes as the appropriation to which transferred.

SEC. 122. Amounts appropriated or otherwise made available in an account funded under the headings in this title may be transferred among projects and activities within the account in accordance with the reprogramming guidelines for military construction and family housing construction contained in Department of Defense Financial Management Regulation 7000.14-R, Volume 3, Chapter 7, of March 2011, as in effect on the date of enactment of this Act.

SEC. 123. None of the funds made available in this title may be obligated or expended for planning and design and construction of projects at Arlington National Cemetery.

SEC. 124. For an additional amount for the accounts and in the amounts specified, to remain available until September 30, 2028:

"Military Construction, Army", \$47,700,000;
 "Military Construction, Navy and Marine Corps", \$689,409,000;
 "Military Construction, Air Force", \$148,300,000;
 "Military Construction, Defense-Wide", \$280,100,000;
 "Military Construction, Army National Guard", \$26,800,000;
 "Military Construction, Air National Guard", \$126,742,000;
 "Military Construction, Army Reserve", \$40,000,000;
 "Military Construction, Air Force Reserve", \$8,500,000; and
 "Family Housing Construction, Air Force", \$27,000,000:

Provided, That such funds may only be obligated to carry out construction projects identified in the respective military department's unfunded priority list for fiscal year

2024 submitted to Congress: *Provided further*, That such projects are subject to authorization prior to obligation and expenditure of funds to carry out construction: *Provided further*, That not later than 60 days after enactment of this Act, the Secretary of the military department concerned, or their designee, shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress an expenditure plan for funds provided under this section.

SEC. 125. All amounts appropriated to the “Department of Defense—Military Construction, Army”, “Department of Defense—Military Construction, Navy and Marine Corps”, “Department of Defense—Military Construction, Air Force”, and “Department of Defense—Military Construction, Defense-Wide” accounts pursuant to the authorization of appropriations in a National Defense Authorization Act specified for fiscal year 2024 in the funding table in section 4601 of that Act shall be immediately available and allotted to contract for the full scope of authorized projects.

SEC. 126. Notwithstanding section 116 of this Act, funds made available in this Act or any available unobligated balances from prior appropriations Acts may be obligated before October 1, 2025, for fiscal year 2017, 2018, and 2019 military construction projects for which project authorization has not lapsed or for which authorization is extended for fiscal year 2024 by a National Defense Authorization Act: *Provided*, That no amounts may be obligated pursuant to this section from amounts that were designated by the Congress as an emergency requirement pursuant to a concurrent resolution on the budget or the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985.

SEC. 127. For the purposes of this Act, the term “congressional defense committees” means the Committees on Armed Services of the House of Representatives and the Senate, the Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs of the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate, and the Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs of the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives.

SEC. 128. For an additional amount for the accounts and in the amounts specified for planning and design and for construction improvements to Department of Defense laboratory facilities, to remain available until September 30, 2028:

“Military Construction, Army”, \$30,000,000;
“Military Construction, Navy and Marine Corps”, \$30,000,000; and

“Military Construction, Air Force”, \$30,000,000;

Provided, That not later than 60 days after enactment of this Act, the Secretary of the military department concerned, or their designee, shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress an expenditure plan for funds provided under this section: *Provided further*, That the Secretary of the military department concerned may not obligate or expend any funds prior to approval by the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the expenditure plan required by this section.

SEC. 129. For an additional amount for “Military Construction, Air Force”, \$252,000,000, to remain available until September 30, 2028, for expenses incurred as a result of natural disasters: *Provided*, That not later than 60 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of the Air Force, or their designee, shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress an expenditure plan for funds provided under this section.

SEC. 130. For an additional amount for the accounts and in the amounts specified for planning and design, for child development

centers, to remain available until September 30, 2028:

“Military Construction, Army”, \$25,000,000;
“Military Construction, Navy and Marine Corps”, \$25,000,000; and

“Military Construction, Air Force”, \$25,000,000;

Provided, That not later than 60 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of the military department concerned, or their designee, shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress an expenditure plan for funds provided under this section.

SEC. 131. For an additional amount for the accounts and amounts specified for planning and design, for barracks, to remain available until September 30, 2028:

“Military Construction Army”, \$65,000,000;
“Military Construction, Navy and Marine Corps”, \$65,000,000; and

“Military Construction, Air Force”, \$65,000,000;

Provided, That not later than 60 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of the military department concerned, or their designee, shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress an expenditure plan for funds provided under this section.

SEC. 132. For an additional amount for the accounts and in the amounts specified for unspecified minor construction for demolition, to remain available until September 30, 2028:

“Military Construction, Army”, \$15,000,000;

“Military Construction, Navy and Marine Corps”, \$15,000,000;

“Military Construction, Air Force”, \$15,000,000;

“Military Construction, Army National Guard”, \$15,000,000;

“Military Construction, Air National Guard”, \$15,000,000;

“Military Construction, Army Reserve”, \$5,000,000;

“Military Construction, Navy Reserve”, \$5,000,000; and

“Military Construction, Air Force Reserve”, \$5,000,000;

Provided, That not later than 60 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of the military department concerned, or their designee, shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress an expenditure plan for funds provided under this section: *Provided further*, That the Secretary of the military department concerned may not obligate or expend any funds prior to approval by the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the expenditure plan required by this section.

SEC. 133. For an additional amount for the accounts and in the amounts specified, to remain available until September 30, 2028:

“Military Construction, Army”, \$122,210,000;

“Military Construction, Air Force”, \$90,400,000;

“Military Construction, Army National Guard”, \$134,881,000; and

“Military Construction, Army Reserve”, \$23,000,000;

Provided, That funds may only be obligated to carry out cost to complete projects identified in the respective military department's unfunded priority list for fiscal year 2024 submitted to Congress: *Provided further*, That such projects are subject to authorization prior to obligation and expenditure funds to carry out construction: *Provided further*, That not later than 60 days after enactment of this Act, the Secretary of the military department concerned, or their designee, shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress an expenditure plan for funds under this section.

SEC. 134. For an additional amount for “Military Construction, Navy and Marine Corps”, \$50,000,000 to remain available until September 30, 2028, for planning and design for Shipyard Infrastructure Optimization Program construction: *Provided*, That not later than 60 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of the Navy, or their designee, shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress an expenditure plan for funds provided under this section.

SEC. 135. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to carry out the closure or realignment of the United States Naval Station, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

SEC. 136. (a) None of the funds made available by this Act for the Department of the Air Force, or any other Department and Agency, may be obligated or expended for the construction or modification of facilities for temporary or permanent use by the United States Space Command for headquarters operations unless, pursuant to subsection (b), the preferred location for permanent headquarters of the United States Space Command is selected or until the required report is submitted.

(b) In the event a permanent location for the headquarters is selected other than the preferred location as identified by the Department of the Air Force in January 2021, the Secretary of the Air Force shall submit to the congressional appropriations committees a report on the rationale for the selection of a permanent location for the headquarters of the United States Space Command.

(c) Subsection (a) shall not apply to any repair necessary to maintain facilities to protect personnel or property.

TITLE II

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION

COMPENSATION AND PENSIONS

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

For the payment of compensation benefits to or on behalf of veterans and a pilot program for disability examinations as authorized by section 107 and chapters 11, 13, 18, 51, 53, 55, and 61 of title 38, United States Code; pension benefits to or on behalf of veterans as authorized by chapters 15, 51, 53, 55, and 61 of title 38, United States Code; and burial benefits, the Reinstated Entitlement Program for Survivors, emergency and other officers' retirement pay, adjusted-service credits and certificates, payment of premiums due on commercial life insurance policies guaranteed under the provisions of title IV of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (50 U.S.C. App. 541 et seq.) and for other benefits as authorized by sections 107, 1312, 1977, and 2106, and chapters 23, 51, 53, 55, and 61 of title 38, United States Code, \$4,655,879,000, which shall be in addition to funds previously appropriated under this heading that become available on October 1, 2023, to remain available until expended; and, in addition, \$181,390,281,000, which shall become available on October 1, 2024, to remain available until expended: *Provided*, That not to exceed \$22,109,000 of the amount made available for fiscal year 2025 under this heading shall be reimbursed to “General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration”, and “Information Technology Systems” for necessary expenses in implementing the provisions of chapters 51, 53, and 55 of title 38, United States Code, the funding source for which is specifically provided as the “Compensation and Pensions” appropriation: *Provided further*, That such sums as may be earned on an actual qualifying patient basis, shall be reimbursed to “Medical Care Collections Fund” to augment the funding of individual medical facilities for nursing home care provided to pensioners as authorized.

READJUSTMENT BENEFITS

For the payment of readjustment and rehabilitation benefits to or on behalf of veterans as authorized by chapters 21, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 36, 39, 41, 51, 53, 55, and 61 of title 38, United States Code, \$11,523,134,000, which shall become available on October 1, 2024, to remain available until expended: *Provided*, That expenses for rehabilitation program services and assistance which the Secretary is authorized to provide under subsection (a) of section 3104 of title 38, United States Code, other than under paragraphs (1), (2), (5), and (11) of that subsection, shall be charged to this account.

VETERANS INSURANCE AND INDEMNITIES

For military and naval insurance, national service life insurance, servicemen's indemnities, service-disabled veterans insurance, and veterans mortgage life insurance as authorized by chapters 19 and 21 of title 38, United States Code, \$12,701,000, which shall be in addition to funds previously appropriated under this heading that become available on October 1, 2023, to remain available until expended; and in addition, \$135,119,422, which shall become available on October 1, 2024, to remain available until expended.

VETERANS HOUSING BENEFIT PROGRAM FUND

For the cost of direct and guaranteed loans, such sums as may be necessary to carry out the program, as authorized by subchapters I through III of chapter 37 of title 38, United States Code: *Provided*, That such costs, including the cost of modifying such loans, shall be as defined in section 502 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974: *Provided further*, That, during fiscal year 2024, within the resources available, not to exceed \$500,000 in gross obligations for direct loans are authorized for specially adapted housing loans.

In addition, for administrative expenses to carry out the direct and guaranteed loan programs, \$316,742,419.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION LOANS PROGRAM ACCOUNT

For the cost of direct loans, \$78,337, as authorized by chapter 31 of title 38, United States Code: *Provided*, That such costs, including the cost of modifying such loans, shall be as defined in section 502 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974: *Provided further*, That funds made available under this heading are available to subsidize gross obligations for the principal amount of direct loans not to exceed \$2,026,000.

In addition, for administrative expenses necessary to carry out the direct loan program, \$460,698, which may be paid to the appropriation for "General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration".

NATIVE AMERICAN VETERAN HOUSING LOAN PROGRAM ACCOUNT

For administrative expenses to carry out the direct loan program authorized by subchapter V of chapter 37 of title 38, United States Code, \$2,718,546.

GENERAL OPERATING EXPENSES, VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION

For necessary operating expenses of the Veterans Benefits Administration, not otherwise provided for, including hire of passenger motor vehicles, reimbursement of the General Services Administration for security guard services, and reimbursement of the Department of Defense for the cost of overseas employee mail, \$3,899,000,000: *Provided*, That expenses for services and assistance authorized under paragraphs (1), (2), (5), and (11) of section 3104(a) of title 38, United States Code, that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs determines are necessary to enable entitled veterans: (1) to the maximum extent fea-

sible, to become employable and to obtain and maintain suitable employment; or (2) to achieve maximum independence in daily living, shall be charged to this account: *Provided further*, That, of the funds made available under this heading, not to exceed 10 percent shall remain available until September 30, 2025.

VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION
MEDICAL SERVICES

For necessary expenses for furnishing, as authorized by law, inpatient and outpatient care and treatment to beneficiaries of the Department of Veterans Affairs and veterans described in section 1705(a) of title 38, United States Code, including care and treatment in facilities not under the jurisdiction of the Department, and including medical supplies and equipment, bioengineering services, food services, and salaries and expenses of healthcare employees hired under title 38, United States Code, assistance and support services for caregivers as authorized by section 1720G of title 38, United States Code, loan repayments authorized by section 604 of the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010 (Public Law 111-163; 124 Stat. 1174; 38 U.S.C. 7681 note), monthly assistance allowances authorized by section 322(d) of title 38, United States Code, grants authorized by section 521A of title 38, United States Code, and administrative expenses necessary to carry out sections 322(d) and 521A of title 38, United States Code, and hospital care and medical services authorized by section 1787 of title 38, United States Code; \$71,000,000,000, plus reimbursements, shall become available on October 1, 2024, and shall remain available until September 30, 2025: *Provided*, That, of the amount made available on October 1, 2024, under this heading, \$2,000,000,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2026: *Provided further*, That, notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall establish a priority for the provision of medical treatment for veterans who have service-connected disabilities, lower income, or have special needs: *Provided further*, That, notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall give priority funding for the provision of basic medical benefits to veterans in enrollment priority groups 1 through 6: *Provided further*, That, notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs may authorize the dispensing of prescription drugs from Veterans Health Administration facilities to enrolled veterans with privately written prescriptions based on requirements established by the Secretary: *Provided further*, That the implementation of the program described in the previous proviso shall incur no additional cost to the Department of Veterans Affairs: *Provided further*, That the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall ensure that sufficient amounts appropriated under this heading for medical supplies and equipment are available for the acquisition of prosthetics designed specifically for female veterans: *Provided further*, That nothing in section 2044(e)(1) of title 38, United States Code, may be construed as limiting amounts that may be made available under this heading for fiscal years 2024 and 2025 in this or prior Acts.

MEDICAL COMMUNITY CARE

For necessary expenses for furnishing health care to individuals pursuant to chapter 17 of title 38, United States Code, at non-Department facilities, \$20,382,000,000, plus reimbursements, shall become available on October 1, 2024, and shall remain available until September 30, 2025: *Provided*, That, of the amount made available on October 1, 2024, under this heading, \$2,000,000,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2026.

MEDICAL SUPPORT AND COMPLIANCE

For necessary expenses in the administration of the medical, hospital, nursing home, domiciliary, construction, supply, and research activities, as authorized by law; administrative expenses in support of capital policy activities; and administrative and legal expenses of the Department for collecting and recovering amounts owed the Department as authorized under chapter 17 of title 38, United States Code, and the Federal Medical Care Recovery Act (42 U.S.C. 2651 et seq.), \$11,800,000,000, plus reimbursements, shall become available on October 1, 2024, and shall remain available until September 30, 2025: *Provided*, That, of the amount made available on October 1, 2024, under this heading, \$350,000,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2026.

MEDICAL FACILITIES

For necessary expenses for the maintenance and operation of hospitals, nursing homes, domiciliary facilities, and other necessary facilities of the Veterans Health Administration; for administrative expenses in support of planning, design, project management, real property acquisition and disposition, construction, and renovation of any facility under the jurisdiction or for the use of the Department; for oversight, engineering, and architectural activities not charged to project costs; for repairing, altering, improving, or providing facilities in the several hospitals and homes under the jurisdiction of the Department, not otherwise provided for, either by contract or by the hire of temporary employees and purchase of materials; for leases of facilities; and for laundry services; \$9,400,000,000, plus reimbursements, shall become available on October 1, 2024, and shall remain available until September 30, 2025: *Provided*, That, of the amount made available on October 1, 2024, under this heading, \$500,000,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2026.

MEDICAL AND PROSTHETIC RESEARCH

For necessary expenses in carrying out programs of medical and prosthetic research and development as authorized by chapter 73 of title 38, United States Code, \$938,000,000, plus reimbursements, shall remain available until September 30, 2025: *Provided*, That the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall ensure that sufficient amounts appropriated under this heading are available for prosthetic research specifically for female veterans, and for toxic exposure research.

NATIONAL CEMETERY ADMINISTRATION

For necessary expenses of the National Cemetery Administration for operations and maintenance, not otherwise provided for, including uniforms or allowances therefor; cemeterial expenses as authorized by law; purchase of one passenger motor vehicle for use in cemeterial operations; hire of passenger motor vehicles; and repair, alteration or improvement of facilities under the jurisdiction of the National Cemetery Administration, \$480,000,000, of which not to exceed 10 percent shall remain available until September 30, 2025.

DEPARTMENTAL ADMINISTRATION

GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

For necessary operating expenses of the Department of Veterans Affairs, not otherwise provided for, including administrative expenses in support of Department-wide capital planning, management and policy activities, uniforms, or allowances therefor; not to exceed \$25,000 for official reception and representation expenses; hire of passenger motor vehicles; and reimbursement of the General Services Administration for security guard services, \$475,000,000, of which not to

exceed 10 percent shall remain available until September 30, 2025: *Provided*, That funds provided under this heading may be transferred to “General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration”.

BOARD OF VETERANS APPEALS

For necessary operating expenses of the Board of Veterans Appeals, \$287,000,000 of which not to exceed 10 percent shall remain available until September 30, 2025.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SYSTEMS (INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

For necessary expenses for information technology systems and telecommunications support, including developmental information systems and operational information systems; for pay and associated costs; and for the capital asset acquisition of information technology systems, including management and related contractual costs of said acquisitions, including contractual costs associated with operations authorized by section 3109 of title 5, United States Code, \$6,401,000,000, plus reimbursements: *Provided*, That \$1,606,977,000 shall be for pay and associated costs, of which not to exceed 3 percent shall remain available until September 30, 2025: *Provided further*, That \$4,668,373,000 shall be for operations and maintenance, of which not to exceed 5 percent shall remain available until September 30, 2025: *Provided further*, That \$125,650,000 shall be for information technology systems development, and shall remain available until September 30, 2025: *Provided further*, That amounts made available for salaries and expenses, operations and maintenance, and information technology systems development may be transferred among the three subaccounts after the Secretary of Veterans Affairs requests from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress the authority to make the transfer and an approval is issued: *Provided further*, That amounts made available for the “Information Technology Systems” account for development may be transferred among projects or to newly defined projects: *Provided further*, That no project may be increased or decreased by more than \$3,000,000 of cost prior to submitting a request to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress to make the transfer and an approval is issued, or absent a response, a period of 30 days has elapsed: *Provided further*, That the funds made available under this heading for information technology systems development shall be for the projects, and in the amounts, specified in the table entitled “Information Technology Development Projects” under this heading in the report accompanying this Act.

VETERANS ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORD

For activities related to implementation, preparation, development, interface, management, rollout, and maintenance of a Veterans Electronic Health Record system, including contractual costs associated with operations authorized by section 3109 of title 5, United States Code, and salaries and expenses of employees hired under titles 5 and 38, United States Code, \$1,863,000,000, to remain available until September 30, 2026: *Provided*, That the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress quarterly reports detailing obligations, expenditures, and deployment implementation by facility, including any changes from the deployment plan or schedule: *Provided further*, That the funds provided in this account shall only be available to the Office of the Deputy Secretary, to be administered by that Office: *Provided further*, That 25 percent of the funds made available under this heading shall not be available until July 1, 2024, and are con-

tingent upon the Secretary of Veterans Affairs—

(1) providing the Committees on Appropriations a report detailing the status of outstanding issues impacting the stability and usability of the new electronic health record system, including those that contributed to the October 13, 2022, deployment delay, along with a timeline and measurable metrics to resolve issues, no later than 60 days after enactment of this Act;

(2) certifying and detailing any changes to the full deployment schedule, no later than 60 days prior to July 1, 2024; and

(3) certifying in writing no later than 30 days prior to July 1, 2024, the following—

(A) the status of issues included in the report referenced in paragraph (1), including issues that have not been closed but have been suitably resolved or mitigated in a manner that will enhance provider productivity and minimize the potential for patient harm; and

(B) whether the system is stable, ready, and optimized for further deployment at VA sites.

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

For necessary expenses of the Office of Inspector General, to include information technology, in carrying out the provisions of the Inspector General Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App.), \$296,000,000, of which not to exceed 10 percent shall remain available until September 30, 2025.

CONSTRUCTION, MAJOR PROJECTS

For constructing, altering, extending, and improving any of the facilities, including parking projects, under the jurisdiction or for the use of the Department of Veterans Affairs, or for any of the purposes set forth in sections 316, 2404, 2406 and chapter 81 of title 38, United States Code, not otherwise provided for, including planning, architectural and engineering services, construction management services, maintenance or guarantee period services costs associated with equipment guarantees provided under the project, services of claims analysts, offsite utility and storm drainage system construction costs, and site acquisition, where the estimated cost of a project is more than the amount set forth in section 8104(a)(3)(A) of title 38, United States Code, or where funds for a project were made available in a previous major project appropriation, \$881,000,000, of which \$373,096,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2028, and of which \$507,904,000 shall remain available until expended, of which \$110,000,000 shall be available for seismic improvement projects and seismic program management activities, including for projects that would otherwise be funded by the Construction, Minor Projects, Medical Facilities or National Cemetery Administration accounts: *Provided*, That except for advance planning activities, including needs assessments which may or may not lead to capital investments, and other capital asset management related activities, including portfolio development and management activities, and planning, cost estimating, and design for major medical facility projects and major medical facility leases and investment strategy studies funded through the advance planning fund and the planning and design activities funded through the design fund, staffing expenses, and funds provided for the purchase, security, and maintenance of land for the National Cemetery Administration through the land acquisition line item, none of the funds made available under this heading shall be used for any project that has not been notified to Congress through the budgetary process or that has not been approved by the Congress through statute, joint resolution, or in the explanatory statement ac-

companying such Act and presented to the President at the time of enrollment: *Provided further*, That such sums as may be necessary shall be available to reimburse the “General Administration” account for payment of salaries and expenses of all Office of Construction and Facilities Management employees to support the full range of capital infrastructure services provided, including minor construction and leasing services: *Provided further*, That funds made available under this heading for fiscal year 2024, for each approved project shall be obligated: (1) by the awarding of a construction documents contract by September 30, 2024; and (2) by the awarding of a construction contract by September 30, 2025: *Provided further*, That the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall promptly submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress a written report on any approved major construction project for which obligations are not incurred within the time limitations established above: *Provided further*, That notwithstanding the requirements of section 8104(a) of title 38, United States Code, amounts made available under this heading for seismic improvement projects and seismic program management activities shall be available for the completion of both new and existing seismic projects of the Department.

CONSTRUCTION, MINOR PROJECTS

For constructing, altering, extending, and improving any of the facilities, including parking projects, under the jurisdiction or for the use of the Department of Veterans Affairs, including planning and assessments of needs which may lead to capital investments, architectural and engineering services, maintenance or guarantee period services costs associated with equipment guarantees provided under the project, services of claims analysts, offsite utility and storm drainage system construction costs, and site acquisition, or for any of the purposes set forth in sections 316, 2404, 2406 and chapter 81 of title 38, United States Code, not otherwise provided for, where the estimated cost of a project is equal to or less than the amount set forth in section 8104(a)(3)(A) of title 38, United States Code, \$680,000,000, of which \$612,000,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2028, and of which \$68,000,000 shall remain available until expended, along with unobligated balances of previous “Construction, Minor Projects” appropriations which are hereby made available for any project where the estimated cost is equal to or less than the amount set forth in such section: *Provided*, That funds made available under this heading shall be for: (1) repairs to any of the nonmedical facilities under the jurisdiction or for the use of the Department which are necessary because of loss or damage caused by any natural disaster or catastrophe; and (2) temporary measures necessary to prevent or to minimize further loss by such causes.

GRANTS FOR CONSTRUCTION OF STATE EXTENDED CARE FACILITIES

For grants to assist States to acquire or construct State nursing home and domiciliary facilities and to remodel, modify, or alter existing hospital, nursing home, and domiciliary facilities in State homes, for furnishing care to veterans as authorized by sections 8131 through 8137 of title 38, United States Code, \$164,000,000, to remain available until expended.

GRANTS FOR CONSTRUCTION OF VETERANS CEMETERIES

For grants to assist States and tribal organizations in establishing, expanding, or improving veterans cemeteries as authorized by section 2408 of title 38, United States Code, \$60,000,000, to remain available until expended.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISIONS
(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 201. Any appropriation for fiscal year 2024 for “Compensation and Pensions”, “Readjustment Benefits”, and “Veterans Insurance and Indemnities” may be transferred as necessary to any other of the mentioned appropriations: *Provided*, That, before a transfer may take place, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall request from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress the authority to make the transfer and such Committees issue an approval, or absent a response, a period of 30 days has elapsed.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 202. Amounts made available for the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2024, in this or any other Act, under the “Medical Services”, “Medical Community Care”, “Medical Support and Compliance”, and “Medical Facilities” accounts may be transferred among the accounts: *Provided*, That any transfers among the “Medical Services”, “Medical Community Care”, and “Medical Support and Compliance” accounts of 1 percent or less of the total amount appropriated to the account in this or any other Act may take place subject to notification from the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the amount and purpose of the transfer: *Provided further*, That any transfers among the “Medical Services”, “Medical Community Care”, and “Medical Support and Compliance” accounts in excess of 1 percent, or exceeding the cumulative 1 percent for the fiscal year, may take place only after the Secretary requests from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress the authority to make the transfer and an approval is issued: *Provided further*, That any transfers to or from the “Medical Facilities” account may take place only after the Secretary requests from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress the authority to make the transfer and an approval is issued.

SEC. 203. Appropriations available in this title for salaries and expenses shall be available for services authorized by section 3109 of title 5, United States Code; hire of passenger motor vehicles; lease of a facility or land or both; and uniforms or allowances therefore, as authorized by sections 5901 through 5902 of title 5, United States Code.

SEC. 204. No appropriations in this title (except the appropriations for “Construction, Major Projects”, and “Construction, Minor Projects”) shall be available for the purchase of any site for or toward the construction of any new hospital or home.

SEC. 205. No appropriations in this title shall be available for hospitalization or examination of any persons (except beneficiaries entitled to such hospitalization or examination under the laws providing such benefits to veterans, and persons receiving such treatment under sections 7901 through 7904 of title 5, United States Code, or the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5121 et seq.)), unless reimbursement of the cost of such hospitalization or examination is made to the “Medical Services” account at such rates as may be fixed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

SEC. 206. Appropriations available in this title for “Compensation and Pensions”, “Readjustment Benefits”, and “Veterans Insurance and Indemnities” shall be available for payment of prior year accrued obligations required to be recorded by law against the corresponding prior year accounts within the last quarter of fiscal year 2023.

SEC. 207. Appropriations available in this title shall be available to pay prior year obli-

gations of corresponding prior year appropriations accounts resulting from sections 3328(a), 3334, and 3712(a) of title 31, United States Code, except that if such obligations are from trust fund accounts they shall be payable only from “Compensation and Pensions”.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 208. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, during fiscal year 2024, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall, from the National Service Life Insurance Fund under section 1920 of title 38, United States Code, the Veterans’ Special Life Insurance Fund under section 1923 of title 38, United States Code, and the United States Government Life Insurance Fund under section 1955 of title 38, United States Code, reimburse the “General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration” and “Information Technology Systems” accounts for the cost of administration of the insurance programs financed through those accounts: *Provided*, That reimbursement shall be made only from the surplus earnings accumulated in such an insurance program during fiscal year 2024 that are available for dividends in that program after claims have been paid and actuarially determined reserves have been set aside: *Provided further*, That if the cost of administration of such an insurance program exceeds the amount of surplus earnings accumulated in that program, reimbursement shall be made only to the extent of such surplus earnings: *Provided further*, That the Secretary shall determine the cost of administration for fiscal year 2024 which is properly allocable to the provision of each such insurance program and to the provision of any total disability income insurance included in that insurance program.

SEC. 209. Amounts deducted from enhanced-use lease proceeds to reimburse an account for expenses incurred by that account during a prior fiscal year for providing enhanced-use lease services shall be available until expended.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 210. Funds available in this title or funds for salaries and other administrative expenses shall also be available to reimburse the Office of Resolution Management, Diversity and Inclusion, the Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication, and the Alternative Dispute Resolution function within the Office of Human Resources and Administration for all services provided at rates which will recover actual costs but not to exceed \$86,481,000 for the Office of Resolution Management, Diversity and Inclusion, \$6,960,000 for the Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication, and \$7,772,000 for the Alternative Dispute Resolution function within the Office of Human Resources and Administration: *Provided*, That payments may be made in advance for services to be furnished based on estimated costs: *Provided further*, That amounts received shall be credited to the “General Administration” and “Information Technology Systems” accounts for use by the office that provided the service.

SEC. 211. No funds of the Department of Veterans Affairs shall be available for hospital care, nursing home care, or medical services provided to any person under chapter 17 of title 38, United States Code, for a non-service-connected disability described in section 1729(a)(2) of such title, unless that person has disclosed to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in such form as the Secretary may require, current, accurate third-party reimbursement information for purposes of section 1729 of such title: *Provided*, That the Secretary may recover, in the same manner as any other debt due the United States, the reasonable charges for such care or services

from any person who does not make such disclosure as required: *Provided further*, That any amounts so recovered for care or services provided in a prior fiscal year may be obligated by the Secretary during the fiscal year in which amounts are received.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 212. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, proceeds or revenues derived from enhanced-use leasing activities (including disposal) may be deposited into the “Construction, Major Projects” and “Construction, Minor Projects” accounts and be used for construction (including site acquisition and disposition), alterations, and improvements of any medical facility under the jurisdiction or for the use of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Such sums as realized are in addition to the amount provided for in “Construction, Major Projects” and “Construction, Minor Projects”.

SEC. 213. Amounts made available under “Medical Services” are available—

(1) for furnishing recreational facilities, supplies, and equipment; and

(2) for funeral expenses, burial expenses, and other expenses incidental to funerals and burials for beneficiaries receiving care in the Department.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 214. Such sums as may be deposited into the Medical Care Collections Fund pursuant to section 1729A of title 38, United States Code, may be transferred to the “Medical Services” and “Medical Community Care” accounts to remain available until expended for the purposes of these accounts.

SEC. 215. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may enter into agreements with Federally Qualified Health Centers in the State of Alaska and Indian Tribes and Tribal organizations which are party to the Alaska Native Health Compact with the Indian Health Service, to provide healthcare, including behavioral health and dental care, to veterans in rural Alaska. The Secretary shall require participating veterans and facilities to comply with all appropriate rules and regulations, as established by the Secretary. The term “rural Alaska” shall mean those lands which are not within the boundaries of the municipality of Anchorage or the Fairbanks North Star Borough.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 216. Such sums as may be deposited into the Department of Veterans Affairs Capital Asset Fund pursuant to section 8118 of title 38, United States Code, may be transferred to the “Construction, Major Projects” and “Construction, Minor Projects” accounts, to remain available until expended for the purposes of these accounts.

SEC. 217. Not later than 30 days after the end of each fiscal quarter, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress a report on the financial status of the Department of Veterans Affairs for the preceding quarter: *Provided*, That, at a minimum, the report shall include the direction contained in the paragraph entitled “Quarterly reporting”, under the heading “General Administration” in the joint explanatory statement accompanying Public Law 114-223.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 218. Amounts made available under the “Medical Services”, “Medical Community Care”, “Medical Support and Compliance”, “Medical Facilities”, “General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration”, “Board of Veterans Appeals”, “General Administration”, and “National Cemetery Administration” accounts for fiscal year 2024 may be transferred to or from the “Information Technology Systems” account: *Provided*, That such transfers may not

result in a more than 10 percent aggregate increase in the total amount made available by this Act for the “Information Technology Systems” account: *Provided further*, That, before a transfer may take place, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall request from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress the authority to make the transfer and an approval is issued.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 219. Of the amounts appropriated to the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2024 for “Medical Services”, “Medical Community Care”, “Medical Support and Compliance”, “Medical Facilities”, “Construction, Minor Projects”, and “Information Technology Systems”, up to \$430,532,000, plus reimbursements, may be transferred to the Joint Department of Defense—Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Facility Demonstration Fund, established by section 1704 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010 (Public Law 111-84; 123 Stat. 2571) and may be used for operation of the facilities designated as combined Federal medical facilities as described by section 706 of the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009 (Public Law 110-417; 122 Stat. 4500): *Provided*, That additional funds may be transferred from accounts designated in this section to the Joint Department of Defense—Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Facility Demonstration Fund upon written notification by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress: *Provided further*, That section 220 of title II of division J of Public Law 117-328 is repealed.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 220. Of the amounts appropriated to the Department of Veterans Affairs which become available on October 1, 2024, for “Medical Services”, “Medical Community Care”, “Medical Support and Compliance”, and “Medical Facilities”, up to \$456,547,000, plus reimbursements, may be transferred to the Joint Department of Defense—Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Facility Demonstration Fund, established by section 1704 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010 (Public Law 111-84; 123 Stat. 2571) and may be used for operation of the facilities designated as combined Federal medical facilities as described by section 706 of the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009 (Public Law 110-417; 122 Stat. 4500): *Provided*, That additional funds may be transferred from accounts designated in this section to the Joint Department of Defense—Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Facility Demonstration Fund upon written notification by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 221. Such sums as may be deposited into the Medical Care Collections Fund pursuant to section 1729A of title 38, United States Code, for healthcare provided at facilities designated as combined Federal medical facilities as described by section 706 of the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009 (Public Law 110-417; 122 Stat. 4500) shall also be available: (1) for transfer to the Joint Department of Defense—Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Facility Demonstration Fund, established by section 1704 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010 (Public Law 111-84; 123 Stat. 2571); and (2) for operations of the facilities designated as combined Federal medical facilities as described by section 706 of the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authoriza-

tion Act for Fiscal Year 2009 (Public Law 110-417; 122 Stat. 4500): *Provided*, That, notwithstanding section 1704(b)(3) of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010 (Public Law 111-84; 123 Stat. 2573), amounts transferred to the Joint Department of Defense—Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Facility Demonstration Fund shall remain available until expended.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 222. Of the amounts available in this title for “Medical Services”, “Medical Community Care”, “Medical Support and Compliance”, and “Medical Facilities”, a minimum of \$15,000,000 shall be transferred to the DOD-VA Health Care Sharing Incentive Fund, as authorized by section 8111(d) of title 38, United States Code, to remain available until expended, for any purpose authorized by section 8111 of title 38, United States Code.

SEC. 223. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall notify the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of all bid savings in a major construction project that total at least \$5,000,000, or 5 percent of the programmed amount of the project, whichever is less: *Provided*, That such notification shall occur within 14 days of a contract identifying the programmed amount: *Provided further*, That the Secretary shall notify the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress 14 days prior to the obligation of such bid savings and shall describe the anticipated use of such savings.

SEC. 224. None of the funds made available for “Construction, Major Projects” may be used for a project in excess of the scope specified for that project in the original justification data provided to the Congress as part of the request for appropriations unless the Secretary of Veterans Affairs receives approval from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress.

SEC. 225. Not later than 30 days after the end of each fiscal quarter, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress a quarterly report containing performance measures and data from each Veterans Benefits Administration Regional Office: *Provided*, That, at a minimum, the report shall include the direction contained in the section entitled “Disability claims backlog”, under the heading “General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration” in the joint explanatory statement accompanying Public Law 114-223: *Provided further*, That the report shall also include information on the number of appeals pending at the Veterans Benefits Administration as well as the Board of Veterans Appeals on a quarterly basis.

SEC. 226. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall provide written notification to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress 15 days prior to organizational changes which result in the transfer of 25 or more full-time equivalents from one organizational unit of the Department of Veterans Affairs to another.

SEC. 227. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall provide on a quarterly basis to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress notification of any single national outreach and awareness marketing campaign in which obligations exceed \$1,000,000.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 228. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs, upon determination that such action is necessary to address needs of the Veterans Health Administration, may transfer to the “Medical Services” account any discretionary appropriations made available for fiscal year 2024 in this title (except appropriations made to the “General Operating

Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration” account) or any discretionary unobligated balances within the Department of Veterans Affairs, including those appropriated for fiscal year 2024, that were provided in advance by appropriations Acts: *Provided*, That transfers shall be made only with the approval of the Office of Management and Budget: *Provided further*, That the transfer authority provided in this section is in addition to any other transfer authority provided by law: *Provided further*, That no amounts may be transferred from amounts that were designated by Congress as an emergency requirement pursuant to a concurrent resolution on the budget or the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985: *Provided further*, That such authority to transfer may not be used unless for higher priority items, based on emergent healthcare requirements, than those for which originally appropriated and in no case where the item for which funds are requested has been denied by Congress: *Provided further*, That, upon determination that all or part of the funds transferred from an appropriation are not necessary, such amounts may be transferred back to that appropriation and shall be available for the same purposes as originally appropriated: *Provided further*, That before a transfer may take place, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall request from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress the authority to make the transfer and receive approval of that request.

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

SEC. 229. Amounts made available for the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2024, under the “Board of Veterans Appeals” and the “General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration” accounts may be transferred between such accounts: *Provided*, That before a transfer may take place, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall request from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress the authority to make the transfer and receive approval of that request.

SEC. 230. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may not reprogram funds among major construction projects or programs if such instance of reprogramming will exceed \$7,000,000, unless such reprogramming is approved by the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress.

SEC. 231. (a) The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall ensure that the toll-free suicide hotline under section 1720F(h) of title 38, United States Code—

(1) provides to individuals who contact the hotline immediate assistance from a trained professional; and

(2) adheres to all requirements of the American Association of Suicidology.

(b)(1) None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to enforce or otherwise carry out any Executive action that prohibits the Secretary of Veterans Affairs from appointing an individual to occupy a vacant civil service position, or establishing a new civil service position, at the Department of Veterans Affairs with respect to such a position relating to the hotline specified in subsection (a).

(2) In this subsection—

(A) the term “civil service” has the meaning given such term in section 2101(1) of title 5, United States Code; and

(B) the term “Executive action” includes—

(i) any Executive order, Presidential memorandum, or other action by the President; and

(ii) any agency policy, order, or other directive.

(c)(1) The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall conduct a study on the effectiveness of

the hotline specified in subsection (a) during the 5-year period beginning on January 1, 2016, based on an analysis of national suicide data and data collected from such hotline.

(2) At a minimum, the study required by paragraph (1) shall—

(A) determine the number of veterans who contact the hotline specified in subsection (a) and who receive follow up services from the hotline or mental health services from the Department of Veterans Affairs thereafter;

(B) determine the number of veterans who contact the hotline who are not referred to, or do not continue receiving, mental health care who commit suicide; and

(C) determine the number of veterans described in subparagraph (A) who commit or attempt suicide.

SEC. 232. Effective during the period beginning on October 1, 2018, and ending on January 1, 2025, none of the funds made available to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs by this or any other Act may be obligated or expended in contravention of the “Veterans Health Administration Clinical Preventive Services Guidance Statement on the Veterans Health Administration’s Screening for Breast Cancer Guidance” published on May 10, 2017, as issued by the Veterans Health Administration National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention.

SEC. 233. (a) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the amounts appropriated or otherwise made available to the Department of Veterans Affairs for the “Medical Services” account may be used to provide—

(1) fertility counseling and treatment using assisted reproductive technology to a covered veteran or the spouse of a covered veteran; or

(2) adoption reimbursement to a covered veteran.

(b) In this section:

(1) The term “service-connected” has the meaning given such term in section 101 of title 38, United States Code.

(2) The term “covered veteran” means a veteran, as such term is defined in section 101 of title 38, United States Code, who has a service-connected disability that results in the inability of the veteran to procreate without the use of fertility treatment.

(3) The term “assisted reproductive technology” means benefits relating to reproductive assistance provided to a member of the Armed Forces who incurs a serious injury or illness on active duty pursuant to section 1074(c)(4)(A) of title 10, United States Code, as described in the memorandum on the subject of “Policy for Assisted Reproductive Services for the Benefit of Seriously or Severely Ill/Injured (Category II or III) Active Duty Service Members” issued by the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs on April 3, 2012, and the guidance issued to implement such policy, including any limitations on the amount of such benefits available to such a member except that—

(A) the time periods regarding embryo cryopreservation and storage set forth in part III(G) and in part IV(H) of such memorandum shall not apply; and

(B) such term includes embryo cryopreservation and storage without limitation on the duration of such cryopreservation and storage.

(4) The term “adoption reimbursement” means reimbursement for the adoption-related expenses for an adoption that is finalized after the date of the enactment of this Act under the same terms as apply under the adoption reimbursement program of the Department of Defense, as authorized in Department of Defense Instruction 1341.09, including the reimbursement limits and requirements set forth in such instruction.

(c) Amounts made available for the purposes specified in subsection (a) of this sec-

tion are subject to the requirements for funds contained in section 508 of division H of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018 (Public Law 115-141).

SEC. 234. None of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available by this Act or any other Act for the Department of Veterans Affairs may be used in a manner that is inconsistent with: (1) section 842 of the Transportation, Treasury, Housing and Urban Development, the Judiciary, the District of Columbia, and Independent Agencies Appropriations Act, 2006 (Public Law 109-115; 119 Stat. 2506); or (2) section 8110(a)(5) of title 38, United States Code.

SEC. 235. Section 842 of Public Law 109-115 shall not apply to conversion of an activity or function of the Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefits Administration, or National Cemetery Administration to contractor performance by a business concern that is at least 51 percent owned by one or more Indian Tribes as defined in section 5304(e) of title 25, United States Code, or one or more Native Hawaiian Organizations as defined in section 637(a)(15) of title 15, United States Code.

SEC. 236. (a) Except as provided in subsection (b), the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in consultation with the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Labor, shall discontinue using Social Security account numbers to identify individuals in all information systems of the Department of Veterans Affairs as follows:

(1) For all veterans submitting to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs new claims for benefits under laws administered by the Secretary, not later than September 30, 2024.

(2) For all individuals not described in paragraph (1), not later than March 23, 2026.

(b) The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may use a Social Security account number to identify an individual in an information system of the Department of Veterans Affairs if and only if the use of such number is required to obtain information the Secretary requires from an information system that is not under the jurisdiction of the Secretary.

(c) The matter in subsections (a) and (b) shall supersede section 238 of division F of Public Law 116-94.

SEC. 237. For funds provided to the Department of Veterans Affairs for each of fiscal year 2024 and 2025 for “Medical Services”, section 239 of division A of Public Law 114-223 shall apply.

SEC. 238. None of the funds appropriated in this or prior appropriations Acts or otherwise made available to the Department of Veterans Affairs may be used to transfer any amounts from the Filipino Veterans Equity Compensation Fund to any other account within the Department of Veterans Affairs.

SEC. 239. Of the funds provided to the Department of Veterans Affairs for each of fiscal year 2024 and fiscal year 2025 for “Medical Services”, funds may be used in each year to carry out and expand the child care program authorized by section 205 of Public Law 111-163, notwithstanding subsection (e) of such section.

SEC. 240. None of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available in this title may be used by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to enter into an agreement related to resolving a dispute or claim with an individual that would restrict in any way the individual from speaking to members of Congress or their staff on any topic not otherwise prohibited from disclosure by Federal law or required by Executive order to be kept secret in the interest of national defense or the conduct of foreign affairs.

SEC. 241. For funds provided to the Department of Veterans Affairs for each of fiscal year 2024 and 2025, section 258 of division A of Public Law 114-223 shall apply.

SEC. 242. (a) None of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available by this Act may be used to deny an Inspector General funded under this Act timely access to any records, documents, or other materials available to the department or agency over which that Inspector General has responsibilities under the Inspector General Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App.), or to prevent or impede the access of the Inspector General to such records, documents, or other materials, under any provision of law, except a provision of law that expressly refers to such Inspector General and expressly limits the right of access.

(b) A department or agency covered by this section shall provide its Inspector General access to all records, documents, and other materials in a timely manner.

(c) Each Inspector General shall ensure compliance with statutory limitations on disclosure relevant to the information provided by the establishment over which that Inspector General has responsibilities under the Inspector General Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App.).

(d) Each Inspector General covered by this section shall report to the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate and the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives within 5 calendar days of any failure by any department or agency covered by this section to comply with this requirement.

SEC. 243. None of the funds made available in this Act may be used in a manner that would increase wait times for veterans who seek care at medical facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

SEC. 244. None of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available by this Act to the Veterans Health Administration may be used in fiscal year 2024 to convert any program which received specific purpose funds in fiscal year 2023 to a general purpose funded program unless the Secretary of Veterans Affairs submits written notification of any such proposal to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress at least 30 days prior to any such action and an approval is issued by the Committees.

SEC. 245. For funds provided to the Department of Veterans Affairs for each of fiscal year 2024 and 2025, section 248 of division A of Public Law 114-223 shall apply.

SEC. 246. (a) None of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available by this Act may be used to conduct research commencing on or after October 1, 2019, that uses any canine, feline, or non-human primate unless the Secretary of Veterans Affairs approves such research specifically and in writing pursuant to subsection (b).

(b)(1) The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may approve the conduct of research commencing on or after October 1, 2019, using canines, felines, or non-human primates if the Secretary determines that—

(A) the scientific objectives of the research can only be met by using such canines, felines, or non-human primates;

(B) such scientific objectives are directly related to an illness or injury that is combat-related; and

(C) the research is consistent with the revised Department of Veterans Affairs canine research policy document dated December 15, 2017, including any subsequent revisions to such document.

(2) The Secretary may not delegate the authority under this subsection.

(c) If the Secretary approves any new research pursuant to subsection (b), not later than 30 days before the commencement of such research, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations of the Senate and House of Representatives a report describing—

(1) the nature of the research to be conducted using canines, felines, or non-human primates;

(2) the date on which the Secretary approved the research;

(3) the justification for the determination of the Secretary that the scientific objectives of such research could only be met using canines, felines, or non-human primates;

(4) the frequency and duration of such research; and

(5) the protocols in place to ensure the necessity, safety, and efficacy of the research.

(d) Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, and biannually thereafter, the Secretary shall submit to such Committees a report describing—

(1) any research being conducted by the Department of Veterans Affairs using canines, felines, or non-human primates as of the date of the submittal of the report;

(2) the circumstances under which such research was conducted using canines, felines, or non-human primates;

(3) the justification for using canines, felines, or non-human primates to conduct such research; and

(4) the protocols in place to ensure the necessity, safety, and efficacy of such research.

(e) The Department shall implement a plan under which the Secretary will eliminate or reduce the research conducted using canines, felines, or non-human primates by not later than 5 years after the date of enactment of Public Law 116-94.

SEC. 247. (a) The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may use amounts appropriated or otherwise made available in this title to ensure that the ratio of veterans to full-time employment equivalents within any program of rehabilitation conducted under chapter 31 of title 38, United States Code, does not exceed 125 veterans to one full-time employment equivalent.

(b) Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report on the programs of rehabilitation conducted under chapter 31 of title 38, United States Code, including—

(1) an assessment of the veteran-to-staff ratio for each such program; and

(2) recommendations for such action as the Secretary considers necessary to reduce the veteran-to-staff ratio for each such program.

SEC. 248. Amounts made available for the “Veterans Health Administration, Medical Community Care” account in this or any other Act for fiscal years 2024 and 2025 may be used for expenses that would otherwise be payable from the Veterans Choice Fund established by section 802 of the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act, as amended (38 U.S.C. 1701 note).

SEC. 249. Obligations and expenditures applicable to the “Medical Services” account in fiscal years 2017 through 2019 for aid to state homes (as authorized by section 1741 of title 38, United States Code) shall remain in the “Medical Community Care” account for such fiscal years.

SEC. 250. Of the amounts made available for the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2024, in this or any other Act, under the “Veterans Health Administration—Medical Services”, “Veterans Health Administration—Medical Community Care”, “Veterans Health Administration—Medical Support and Compliance”, and “Veterans Health Administration—Medical Facilities” accounts, \$1,279,096,000 shall be made available for gender-specific care and programmatic efforts to deliver care for women veterans.

SEC. 251. Notwithstanding any other law, by no later than September 30, 2023, the Secretary shall commence construction of the Community Based Outpatient Clinic in Bakersfield, California in accordance with Lease No.36C10F20L0008.

SEC. 252. None of the funds made available in this Act shall be expended for monthly payments under Lease No. VA10112R0032, including section 11 of the lease, that exceed \$223,166.67 unless required for maintenance and repairs or improvements related to the form, fit, or function of the facility that directly enhances the safety of veterans or improves healthcare services.

SEC. 253. Not later than 30 days after the end of each fiscal quarter, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress a quarterly report on the status of the “Veterans Medical Care and Health Fund”, established to execute section 8002 of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (Public Law 117-2): *Provided*, That, at a minimum, the report shall include an update on obligations by program, project or activity and a plan for expending the remaining funds: *Provided further*, That the Secretary of Veterans Affairs must submit notification of any plans to reallocate funds from the current apportionment categories of “Medical Services”, “Medical Support and Compliance”, “Medical Facilities”, “Medical Community Care”, or “Medical and Prosthetic Research”, including the amount and purpose of each reallocation to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress and such Committees issue an approval, or absent a response, a period of 30 days has elapsed.

SEC. 254. Any amounts transferred to the Secretary and administered by a corporation referred to in section 7364(b) of title 38, United States Code, between October 1, 2017 and September 30, 2018 for purposes of carrying out an order placed with the Department of Veterans Affairs pursuant to section 1535 of title 31, United States Code, that are available for obligation pursuant to section 7364(b)(1) of title 38, United States Code, are to remain available for the liquidation of valid obligations incurred by such corporation during the period of performance of such order, provided that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs determines that such amounts need to remain available for such liquidation.

SEC. 255. Unobligated balances available under the headings “Construction, Major Projects” and “Construction, Minor Projects” may be obligated by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for a facility pursuant to section 2(e)(1) of the Communities Helping Invest through Property and Improvements Needed for Veterans Act of 2016 (Public Law 114-294; 38 U.S.C. 8103 note), as amended, to provide additional funds or to fund an escalation clause under such section of such Act: *Provided*, That before such unobligated balances are obligated pursuant to this section, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall request from the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress the authority to obligate such unobligated balances and such Committees issue an approval, or absent a response, a period of 30 days has elapsed: *Provided further*, That the request to obligate such unobligated balances must provide Congress notice that the entity described in section 2(a)(2) of Public Law 114-294, as amended, has exhausted available cost containment approaches as set forth in the agreement under section 2(c) of such Public Law.

SEC. 256. Of the unobligated balances available to the Department of Veterans Affairs from prior appropriations Acts, the following funds are hereby rescinded from the following accounts in the amounts specified:

“Veterans Health Administration—Medical Services”, \$4,933,113,000;

“Veterans Health Administration—Medical Community Care”, \$1,909,069,000; and

“Veterans Health Administration—Medical Facilities”, \$250,515,000.

SEC. 257. Not later than 30 days after the date the funds become available, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations an expenditure plan for funds made available through the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023 (P.L. 118-5) for the Cost of War Toxic Exposures Fund for fiscal years 2024 and 2025.

SEC. 258. (a) None of the funds made available in this Act may be used to implement, administer, or otherwise carry out the Department of Veterans Affairs interim final rule published on September 9, 2022, or any successor to such rule, or to propose, promulgate, or implement any substantially similar rule or policy.

(b) None of the funds appropriated in this Act shall be expended for any abortion, including through a medical benefits package or health benefits program that includes coverage of abortion.

(c) The limitations established in subsection (b) shall not apply to an abortion—

(1) if the pregnancy is the result of an act of rape or incest; or

(2) in the case where a woman suffers from a physical disorder, physical injury, or physical illness, including a life-endangering physical condition caused by or arising from the pregnancy itself, that would, as certified by a physician, place the woman in danger of death unless an abortion is performed.

SEC. 259. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used for surgical procedures or hormone therapies for the purposes of gender affirming care.

SEC. 260. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to fly or display a flag over a facility of the Department of Veterans Affairs or a national cemetery other than the flag of the United States, the flag of a State, Territory, or District of Columbia, the flag of an Indian Tribal government, the flag of the Department, the flag of an Armed Force, or the POW/MIA flag.

TITLE III

RELATED AGENCIES

AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION SALARIES AND EXPENSES

For necessary expenses, not otherwise provided for, of the American Battle Monuments Commission, including the acquisition of land or interest in land in foreign countries; purchases and repair of uniforms for caretakers of national cemeteries and monuments outside of the United States and its territories and possessions; rent of office and garage space in foreign countries; purchase (one-for-one replacement basis only) and hire of passenger motor vehicles; not to exceed \$15,000 for official reception and representation expenses; and insurance of official motor vehicles in foreign countries, when required by law of such countries, \$158,630,000, to remain available until expended.

FOREIGN CURRENCY FLUCTUATIONS ACCOUNT

For necessary expenses, not otherwise provided for, of the American Battle Monuments Commission, such sums as may be necessary, to remain available until expended, for purposes authorized by section 2109 of title 36, United States Code.

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR VETERANS CLAIMS

SALARIES AND EXPENSES

For necessary expenses for the operation of the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims as authorized by sections 7251 through 7298 of title 38, United States Code, \$47,200,000: *Provided*, That \$3,385,000 shall be available for the purpose of providing financial assistance as described and in accordance with the process and reporting procedures set forth under this heading in Public Law 102-229.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE—CIVIL
CEMETERIAL EXPENSES, ARMY
SALARIES AND EXPENSES

For necessary expenses for maintenance, operation, and improvement of Arlington National Cemetery and Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemetery, including the purchase or lease of passenger motor vehicles for replacement on a one-for-one basis only, and not to exceed \$2,000 for official reception and representation expenses, \$100,267,000, of which not to exceed \$15,000,000 shall remain available until September 30, 2026. In addition, such sums as may be necessary for parking maintenance, repairs and replacement, to be derived from the "Lease of Department of Defense Real Property for Defense Agencies" account.

CONSTRUCTION

For necessary expenses for planning and design and construction at Arlington National Cemetery and Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemetery, \$88,600,000, to remain available until expended for planning and design and construction associated with the Southern Expansion project at Arlington National Cemetery.

ARMED FORCES RETIREMENT HOME
TRUST FUND

For expenses necessary for the Armed Forces Retirement Home to operate and maintain the Armed Forces Retirement Home—Washington, District of Columbia, and the Armed Forces Retirement Home—Gulfport, Mississippi, to be paid from funds available in the Armed Forces Retirement Home Trust Fund, \$77,000,000, to remain available until September 30, 2025, of which \$8,940,000 shall remain available until expended for construction and renovation of the physical plants at the Armed Forces Retirement Home—Washington, District of Columbia, and the Armed Forces Retirement Home—Gulfport, Mississippi: *Provided*, That of the amounts made available under this heading from funds available in the Armed Forces Retirement Home Trust Fund, \$25,000,000 shall be paid from the general fund of the Treasury to the Trust Fund.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISION

SEC. 301. Amounts deposited into the special account established under 10 U.S.C. 7727 are appropriated and shall be available until expended to support activities at the Army National Military Cemeteries.

TITLE IV

GENERAL PROVISIONS

SEC. 401. No part of any appropriation contained in this Act shall remain available for obligation beyond the current fiscal year unless expressly so provided herein.

SEC. 402. None of the funds made available in this Act may be used for any program, project, or activity, when it is made known to the Federal entity or official to which the funds are made available that the program, project, or activity is not in compliance with any Federal law relating to risk assessment, the protection of private property rights, or unfunded mandates.

SEC. 403. All departments and agencies funded under this Act are encouraged, within the limits of the existing statutory authorities and funding, to expand their use of "E-Commerce" technologies and procedures in the conduct of their business practices and public service activities.

SEC. 404. Unless stated otherwise, all reports and notifications required by this Act shall be submitted to the Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies of the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives and the Subcommittee on Military

Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies of the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate.

SEC. 405. None of the funds made available in this Act may be transferred to any department, agency, or instrumentality of the United States Government except pursuant to a transfer made by, or transfer authority provided in, this or any other appropriations Act.

SEC. 406. None of the funds made available in this Act may be used for a project or program named for an individual serving as a Member, Delegate, or Resident Commissioner of the United States House of Representatives.

SEC. 407. (a) Any agency receiving funds made available in this Act, shall, subject to subsections (b) and (c), post on the public Web site of that agency any report required to be submitted by the Congress in this or any other Act, upon the determination by the head of the agency that it shall serve the national interest.

(b) Subsection (a) shall not apply to a report if—

(1) the public posting of the report compromises national security; or

(2) the report contains confidential or proprietary information.

(c) The head of the agency posting such report shall do so only after such report has been made available to the requesting Committee or Committees of Congress for no less than 30 days.

SEC. 408. (a) None of the funds made available in this Act may be used to maintain or establish a computer network unless such network blocks the viewing, downloading, and exchanging of pornography.

(b) Nothing in subsection (a) shall limit the use of funds necessary for any Federal, State, tribal, or local law enforcement agency or any other entity carrying out criminal investigations, prosecution, or adjudication activities.

SEC. 409. None of the funds made available in this Act may be used by an agency of the executive branch to pay for first-class travel by an employee of the agency in contravention of sections 301–10.122 through 301–10.124 of title 41, Code of Federal Regulations.

SEC. 410. None of the funds made available in this Act may be used to execute a contract for goods or services, including construction services, where the contractor has not complied with Executive Order No. 12989.

SEC. 411. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used in contravention of section 101(e)(8) of title 10, United States Code.

SEC. 412. (a) IN GENERAL.—None of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available to the Department of Defense in this Act may be used to construct, renovate, or expand any facility in the United States, its territories, or possessions to house any individual detained at United States Naval Station, Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, for the purposes of detention or imprisonment in the custody or under the control of the Department of Defense.

(b) The prohibition in subsection (a) shall not apply to any modification of facilities at United States Naval Station, Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

(c) An individual described in this subsection is any individual who, as of June 24, 2009, is located at United States Naval Station, Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, and who—

(1) is not a citizen of the United States or a member of the Armed Forces of the United States; and

(2) is—

(A) in the custody or under the effective control of the Department of Defense; or

(B) otherwise under detention at United States Naval Station, Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

SEC. 413. None of the funds appropriated by this Act may be used in any way, directly or indirectly, to influence congressional action on any legislation or appropriation matter pending before Congress, other than to communicate to Members of Congress as described in 18 U.S.C. 1913.

SEC. 414. None of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available by this Act may be made available to implement, administer, apply, enforce, or carry out Executive Order 13985 of January 20, 2021 (86 Fed. Reg. 7009), Executive Order 14035 of June 25, 2021 (86 Fed. Reg. 34593), or Executive Order 14091 of February 16, 2023 (88 Fed. Reg. 10825).

SEC. 415. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to carry out any program, project, or activity that promotes or advances Critical Race Theory or any concept associated with Critical Race Theory.

SEC. 416. (a) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding section 7 of title 1, United States Code, section 1738C of title 28, United States Code, or any other provision of law, none of the funds provided by this Act, or previous appropriations Acts, shall be used in whole or in part to take any discriminatory action against a person, wholly or partially, on the basis that such person speaks, or acts, in accordance with a sincerely held religious belief, or moral conviction, that marriage is, or should be recognized as, a union of one man and one woman.

(b) Discriminatory action defined.—As used in subsection (a), a discriminatory action means any action taken by the Federal Government to—

(1) alter in any way the Federal tax treatment of, or cause any tax, penalty, or payment to be assessed against, or deny, delay, or revoke an exemption from taxation under section 501(a) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 of, any person referred to in subsection (a);

(2) disallow a deduction for Federal tax purposes of any charitable contribution made to or by such person;

(3) withhold, reduce the amount or funding for, exclude, terminate, or otherwise make unavailable or deny, any Federal grant, contract, subcontract, cooperative agreement, guarantee, loan, scholarship, license, certification, accreditation, employment, or other similar position or status from or to such person;

(4) withhold, reduce, exclude, terminate, or otherwise make unavailable or deny, any entitlement or benefit under a Federal benefit program, including admission to, equal treatment in, or eligibility for a degree from an educational program, from or to such person; or

(5) withhold, reduce, exclude, terminate, or otherwise make unavailable or deny access or an entitlement to Federal property, facilities, educational institutions, speech fora (including traditional, limited, and non-public fora), or charitable fundraising campaigns from or to such person.

(c) Accreditation; Licensure; Certification.—The Federal Government shall consider accredited, licensed, or certified for purposes of Federal law any person that would be accredited, licensed, or certified, respectively, for such purposes but for a determination against such person wholly or partially on the basis that the person speaks, or acts, in accordance with a sincerely held religious belief or moral conviction described in subsection (a).

SEC. 417. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used for any office, programs, or activity for the purposes of diversity, equity, and inclusion training or implementation.

SPENDING REDUCTION ACCOUNT

SEC. 418. \$0.

This Act may be cited as the “Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2024”.

The Acting CHAIR. All points of order against provisions in the bill are waived.

No amendment to the bill shall be in order except those printed in House Report 118-158, amendments en bloc described in section 3 of House Resolution 614, and pro forma amendments described in section 4 of House Resolution 614.

Each amendment printed in House Report 118-158 may be offered only in the order printed in the report, by the Member designated in the report, shall be considered as read, shall be debatable for the time specified in the report equally divided and controlled by the proponent and an opponent, shall not be subject to the amendment except as provided by section 4 of House Resolution 614, and shall not be subject to a demand for division of the question.

It shall be in order at any time for the chair of the Committee on Appropriations or her designee to offer amendments en bloc consisting of amendments printed in House Report 118-158 not earlier disposed of. Amendments en bloc shall be considered as read, shall be debatable for 20 minutes equally divided and controlled by the chair and ranking minority member of the Committee on Appropriations or their respective designees, shall not be subject to amendment, except as provided by section 4 of House Resolution 614, and shall not be subject to a demand for division of the question.

During consideration of the bill for amendment, the chair and ranking minority member of the Committee on Appropriations or their respective designees may offer up to 10 pro forma amendments each at any point for the purpose of debate.

AMENDMENT NO. 1 OFFERED BY MR. RYAN

The Acting CHAIR. It is now in order to consider amendment No. 1 printed in House Report 118-158.

Mr. RYAN. Mr. Chair, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Page 2, line 18, after the dollar amount, insert “(increased by \$103,000,000) (reduced by \$103,000,000)”.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 614, the gentleman from New York (Mr. RYAN) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New York.

Mr. RYAN. Mr. Chair, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chair, I rise in support of my amendment, which increases Army construction funding by \$103 million to address extensive flood damage at the United States Military Academy at West Point.

A few weeks ago on July 9, New York’s Hudson Valley, along with

other parts of the Northeast, was devastated by a once-in-a-millennium flood that saw nearly 10 inches of torrential rainfall arrive on the Hudson Valley in just a few hours, washing away homes of our military families, devastating roads, businesses in the surrounding community, and tragically costing the life of a young woman in the surrounding community just outside West Point.

My alma mater, the United States Military Academy at West Point, was hit particularly hard. I have been on the ground multiple times seeing the damage firsthand, along with colleagues from both sides of the aisle, to assess the extent of the damage. We have decimated roads, collapsed cliff-side routes, compromising damage to barracks, bridges, and facilities critical to carrying out the vital mission of the United States Military Academy at West Point. In particular, I draw attention to the fact that all of the enlisted soldier barracks, serving hundreds of enlisted soldiers at the garrison have been completely destroyed. There is nowhere for these soldiers on post to live, causing a cascading effect and a real housing crunch across the post.

As of this moment, the cost estimates to rebuild are increasing each day, presently topping out at over \$100 million. As we know, West Point serves a mission-critical role in our Nation’s national security—the world’s premier leadership institute, creating leaders and shaping the future of our Nation’s Army. This institution made myself, many of my colleagues across the aisle, and many others of our Nation, into leaders. We cannot stand by during this time of need for such a critical national security resource.

Allowing West Point to be hamstrung by such significant damage imperils our military readiness, and we must ensure the institution has the resources it needs to urgently repair and rebuild and get back to their mission.

Mr. Chair, I urge the support of my colleagues throughout the Congress, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Mr. Chair, I claim the time in opposition, although I am not opposed.

The Acting CHAIR. Without objection, the gentleman is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Mr. Chair, I support the amendment, and I urge its adoption.

Mr. Chair, I yield such time as she may consume to the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ).

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Chair, I strongly support the gentleman’s amendment and commend him for his efforts to address the severe flooding problems that have occurred in and around West Point.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Mr. Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. RYAN. Mr. Chair, I thank my colleagues for the bipartisan support of this critical amendment, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from New York (Mr. RYAN).

The question was taken; and the Acting Chair announced that the yeas appeared to have it.

Mr. RYAN. Mr. Chair, I demand a recorded vote.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, further proceedings on the amendment offered by the gentleman from New York will be postponed.

□ 1515

AMENDMENT NO. 2 OFFERED BY MR. OGLES

The Acting CHAIR. It is now in order to consider amendment No. 2 printed in House Report 118-158.

Mr. OGLES. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Page 9, line 24, after the dollar amount, insert “(reduced by \$3,000,000)”.

Page 92, line 17, after the dollar amount, insert “(increased by \$3,000,000)”.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 614, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. OGLES) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Tennessee.

Mr. OGLES. Mr. Chair, as we attempt to cut spending back to top-line FY 2022 levels, we must address the glaring \$32.6 trillion debt.

We must commit in this Congress to significant spending cuts. If we don’t, we will be mortgaging the futures of our children. We will perpetually hobble long-term economic growth by not only destroying our future borrowing power but by forcing our Treasury to dedicate much of its future spending to debt repayment rather than meeting the needs of the American people.

If we fail to tackle runaway spending now, we are compromising the well-being of future generations. Is that the legacy we want to leave behind? We have an obligation, a moral one, to ensure that we leave this country better off than we found it.

In an appropriations bill that is supposed to be focused on supporting our veterans and their families, we are sending \$293 million—taxpayer dollars—abroad to support NATO. That is an increase of 33 percent from FY 2023.

There will be some who argue that the \$293 million figure is a commitment that the United States made at the June 2022 NATO summit. While Congress has largely abdicated its role in foreign affairs to the executive branch, it was the intent of our Founding Fathers that this institution provide a robust check on the executive. It is why we have the power of the purse.

Ultimately, given Congress’ massive spending habits, there needs to come a time when we say enough is enough, and that is the purpose for offering this amendment today. I am asking all of

my colleagues if they could spare just a 1 percent cut to NATO's Security Investment Program. That is just 1 percent.

Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Mr. Chair, I rise in opposition to the amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Mr. Chair, the NATO Security Investment Program is NATO's military construction program. The U.S. contribution supports projects needed by the alliance and also supports U.S. strategy in the region. It does not finance other countries' construction costs, and the cost share is favorable to the United States.

The increase included in the bill this year is needed to reinvest in infrastructure in the region to deter Russia's aggression. Literally, this program is a concrete investment in deterrence.

Mr. Chair, I urge my colleagues to support this amendment. I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ).

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Chair, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

I strongly oppose this amendment to cut the NATO Security Investment Program. It is hard to imagine a worse time for us to be cutting funding from our international obligations when Russia has illegally invaded Ukraine and our international obligations and cooperation are so essential in order to ensure that Ukraine can maintain its sovereignty and ensure that Russia is not allowed to be successful here and then repeat the same thing across the globe.

The program, also known as NSIP, is a core part of America's contribution toward shared territorial defense with its allies. Moreover, the projects that NSIP funds often are already aligned with U.S. European Command needs.

Our NSIP contributions often closely align with U.S. requirements, like projects for safety and runway upgrades at airfields that our planes use and fuel and dock improvements at ports that our ships use.

The program is experiencing a period of growth as the alliance seeks to address necessary deferred infrastructure needs. This amendment would cut funding for the program below the requested level, shortchanging America's commitment to its allies, and instead move it to the spending reduction account.

Military construction programs are already funded at \$1.5 billion below the enacted level, as I have talked about, and this amendment is seeking to cut it further.

The United States contribution to NSIP, as a percentage of the overall program, is much smaller proportionally than the United States share of the alliance's gross national income. Simply put, our allies are more than paying their fair share in the Security Investment Program.

NSIP funding is necessary for NATO, and it is necessary for American national security. We should not jeopardize it with this amendment.

Mr. Chair, I urge my colleagues to oppose this amendment.

Mr. OGLES. Mr. Chairman, I have a great deal of respect for my colleagues, but let's talk about America's contribution. We have already spent roughly \$42 billion on equipment and support for Ukraine in addition to these moneys.

When you think about NATO, our allies are supposed to hold up their fair share of the bargain, 2 percent. We are meeting our obligations, but only seven other countries meet their obligations. Keep in mind, it is supposed to be 2 percent. Luxembourg is at 0.62; Canada, 1.29; Turkey, 1.37; Norway, 1.57; Germany, 1.49; and France, 1.89.

Before we start talking about the United States of America doing its job and having to defend the rest of the world, how about our allies do their job and uphold their obligations? I am asking for only a 1 percent cut.

Mr. Chair, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Mr. Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. OGLES. Mr. Chair, it is hard to justify sending hard-earned taxpayer dollars to NATO when most of our allies don't uphold their end of the bargain and when they look to us to be their defender and to fund their security.

Meanwhile, we have a porous border. Every community in this country is a border town because of fentanyl overdoses in the streets and trafficking run amuck. Yet, we are going to spend more money overseas. How about we secure our country and take care of our country, our people, our needs, and secure our border?

Mr. Chair, it is just a 1 percent cut. I encourage all of my colleagues to send a message to NATO and our allies to do their fair share.

Mr. Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. OGLES).

The question was taken; and the Acting Chair announced that the ayes appeared to have it.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Chair, I demand a recorded vote.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, further proceedings on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Tennessee will be postponed.

AMENDMENT NO. 3 OFFERED BY MS. GREENE OF GEORGIA

The Acting CHAIR. It is now in order to consider amendment No. 3 printed in House Report 118-158.

Ms. GREENE of Georgia. Mr. Chair, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Page 9, line 24, strike "\$293,434,000" and insert "\$220,100,000".

Page 92, line 17, after the dollar amount, insert "(increased by \$73,334,000)".

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 614, the gentlewoman from Georgia (Ms. GREENE) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Georgia.

Ms. GREENE of Georgia. Mr. Chair, I rise today to ask the House to support my amendment No. 3, which will cut the \$73 million increase in funding for the NATO Security Investment Program. This is simply keeping the NATO funding at the same level as last year's appropriations level. I think this is very important.

The United States overwhelmingly contributes more than our fair share to NATO for Europe's defense, and it is time for European countries to pay their dues.

While our own border is overrun by border-crossers and deadly, poisonous fentanyl daily, we continue to send hundreds of billions of dollars to NATO to defend Ukraine's democracy, even though they aren't even a NATO member nation.

Investing in NATO security is an America-last policy. All increases in funding should be investing in the United States of America's security and the defense of our own border.

President Trump was exactly right when he called on European nations to put the required minimum of 2 percent of their GDP toward NATO defense spending. Most NATO countries still don't meet that requirement, and the U.S. ends up paying for 70 percent of the alliance's defenses. This is outrageous. The American people do not like paying for other countries' defenses when our borders are overrun daily.

The current 2023 defense expenditure for NATO countries has the United States at \$860 billion. The United States of America's military is not meant to be the world's police. As we find ourselves funding a war in Ukraine, when the United States' position should be pushing for peace, not paying for and not funding war and the death of innocent people, we should not increase our spending and increase the amount of funding by \$73 million more to the NATO Security Investment Program.

Mr. Chair, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Mr. Chair, I claim the time in opposition to the amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Mr. Chair, my arguments are the same.

The NATO Security Investment Program is NATO's military construction program. The \$73 million increase this year is needed to reinvest in infrastructure in the region to deter Russian aggression.

Mr. Chair, I urge my colleagues to oppose this amendment. I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ).

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Chair, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

I rise in opposition to this grossly irresponsible amendment. This amendment would take a huge cut, \$73 million, from the NATO Security Investment Program during a time when increased funding is essential for long-deferred projects.

Cutting funding for the NATO Security Investment Program is not only shortsighted from a national security perspective, but it isn't even sound long-term fiscal policy. These investments ensure a robust American and NATO presence to deter hostile nations and prevent even greater costs to American taxpayers down the road.

One only has to look at the news to understand that we have hostile nations that wish to do us and our allies harm. A \$73 million cut from the NATO Security Investment Program would put us in more jeopardy alongside our allies.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine shows that international cooperation and strong alliances are as essential as ever. These projects are not America paying other countries' bills. In fact, America pays a proportionally small amount to the program compared to the size of our economy in relation to the rest of NATO.

□ 1530

Regardless of your stance on overall defense spending levels of various NATO countries, it is simply not true that the United States is paying more than its share of this direct contribution program.

These projects are agreed-upon NATO requirements and oftentimes have a direct benefit to supplement existing U.S. requirements. These sites include ones directly benefiting U.S. forces through the use of upgraded ports, airfields, and communications.

Our contributions to NATO represent only a small portion of overall defense spending, but the strength of the alliance is an outsized and irreplaceable part of American national security.

This amendment would not even reinvest the funding into other priorities, it simply cuts funding from the bill, shortchanging the military construction portion by over \$73 million. It is irresponsible. It is dangerous.

Mr. Chair, I strongly urge my colleagues to oppose the amendment.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Mr. Chair, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. CONNOLLY).

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Chair, Americans are not fighting and dying in Ukraine, Ukrainians are. All they ask of the great country they admire and they want to emulate is that we help with equipment and training.

Putin benefits from this amendment. Putin, a sociopath, who is engaged in

the most depraved behavior in our lifetime: killing innocent men and women, targeting hospitals, targeting schools, and showing no restraint.

This Congress must stand with Ukraine. This Congress can never be seen as Putin's enabler. That is what this amendment does. That is what is behind it.

The author of this amendment has already said she wants to give zero to Ukraine, so we know the motivation behind the amendment. Let's reject it.

Let's stand with Ukraine and make sure Putin gets that message loud and strong with a forceful voice here on the floor of the House of Representatives.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Mr. Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. GREENE of Georgia. Mr. Chair, perhaps my colleagues are confused. Ukraine is not a member of NATO. Ukraine has not been accepted into NATO. Why are they using defense of Ukraine for their argument for an additional \$73 million increase for the NATO security investment program? That makes absolutely no sense.

If you want to talk about national security, Mr. Chair, let's talk about the American people's national security. My colleague across the aisle speaks of hostile nations and how they present a clear danger to America's national security. Well, you have to look no further than the southern border. The southern border is where hostile nations are invading our country every single day with poisonous fentanyl, which is murdering over 300 Americans a day.

If there is going to be an increase in funding for the defense of any nation, it should be the United States of America's border in defense of American lives.

Mr. Chair, I would like to add, my position and the position of most Americans is peace, not funding the murder and death in continued foreign wars, defending other countries' democracies while completely ignoring our own.

Mr. Chair, I ask the House to pass my amendment that keeps the spending level at the same level it was this previous appropriations bill—the same level. An increase in \$73 million is another step towards funding world war III.

It is another step in United States aggression over a country that is not even a member of NATO in the name of a NATO security investment program. This is absolute madness. It is outrageous.

Mr. Chair, I reserve the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR (Mr. DUNCAN). The gentlewoman from Georgia has the only time remaining.

Ms. GREENE of Georgia. May I inquire how much time I have remaining?

The Acting CHAIR. The gentlewoman has 1 minute remaining.

Ms. GREENE of Georgia. Mr. Chair, I will wrap this up. It is very simple. We are at \$32 trillion in debt. There is no

need to increase spending over the level that it was last year. Americans are already spending \$860 billion for NATO for the defense of other nations. There is no reason to increase it by \$73 million.

My amendment is very simple: It is asking to keep the appropriations level the same as it was this past year.

Mr. Chair, I ask the House to support my amendment, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from Georgia (Ms. GREENE).

The question was taken; and the Acting Chair announced that the ayes appeared to have it.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Mr. Chair, I demand a recorded vote.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, further proceedings on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from Georgia will be postponed.

AMENDMENTS EN BLOC OFFERED BY MR. CARTER OF TEXAS

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Mr. Chair, pursuant to House Resolution 614, I offer amendments en bloc.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendments en bloc.

Amendments en bloc consisting of amendment Nos. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, and 33, printed in House Report 118-158, offered by Mr. CARTER of Texas:

AMENDMENT NO. 4 OFFERED BY MS. PETTERSEN OF COLORADO

Page 24, line 22, after the dollar amount, insert "(increased by \$25,000,000) (reduced by \$25,000,000)".

Page 24, line 24, after the dollar amount, insert "(increased by \$25,000,000) (reduced by \$25,000,000)".

Page 25, line 2, after the dollar amount, insert "(increased by \$25,000,000) (reduced by \$25,000,000)".

AMENDMENT NO. 5 OFFERED BY MS. CARAVEO OF COLORADO

Page 33, line 2, after the dollar amount, insert "(increased by \$2,000,000) (decreased by \$2,000,000)".

AMENDMENT NO. 6 OFFERED BY MR. OGLES OF TENNESSEE

Page 33, line 2, after the dollar amount, insert "(reduced by \$1,000,000) (increased by \$1,000,000)".

AMENDMENT NO. 7 OFFERED BY MR. GOTTHEIMER OF NEW JERSEY

Page 34, line 4, after the dollar amount, insert "(reduced by \$1,000,000) (increased by \$1,000,000)".

AMENDMENT NO. 8 OFFERED BY MR. GOTTHEIMER OF NEW JERSEY

Page 34, line 4, after the dollar amount, insert "(reduced by \$1,000,000) (increased by \$1,000,000)".

AMENDMENT NO. 9 OFFERED BY MS. NORTON OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Page 34, line 4, after the dollar amount, insert "(reduced by \$1,000,000) (increased by \$1,000,000)".

AMENDMENT NO. 10 OFFERED BY MS. ROSS OF NORTH CAROLINA

Page 34, line 4, after the dollar amount, insert "(increased by \$10,000,000) (reduced by \$10,000,000)".

AMENDMENT NO. 11 OFFERED BY MR. ARRINGTON OF TEXAS

Page 35, line 12, after the dollar amount, insert “(reduced by \$10,000,000) (increased by \$10,000,000)”.

AMENDMENT NO. 12 OFFERED BY MRS. BOEBERT OF COLORADO

Page 35, line 12, after the dollar amount, insert “(reduced by \$2,000,000) (increased by \$2,000,000)”.

AMENDMENT NO. 13 OFFERED BY MS. CARAVEO OF COLORADO

Page 35, line 12, after the dollar amount, insert “(increased by \$10,000,000) (decreased by \$10,000,000)”.

AMENDMENT NO. 14 OFFERED BY MR. CARBAJAL OF CALIFORNIA

Page 35, line 12, after the dollar amount, insert “(reduced by \$5,000,000) (increased by \$5,000,000)”.

AMENDMENT NO. 15 OFFERED BY MS. PEREZ OF WASHINGTON

Page 35, line 12, after the dollar amount, insert “(reduced by \$1,000,000) increased by \$1,000,000)”.

AMENDMENT NO. 16 OFFERED BY MR. HUDSON OF NORTH CAROLINA

Page 35, line 12, after the dollar amount, insert “(reduced by \$10,000,000) (increased by \$10,000,000)”.

AMENDMENT NO. 17 OFFERED BY MR. MOLINARO OF NEW YORK

Page 35, line 12, after the first dollar amount, insert “(reduced by 2,000,000) (increased by 2,000,000)”.

AMENDMENT NO. 18 OFFERED BY MR. OGLES OF TENNESSEE

Page 35, line 12, after the dollar amount, insert “(reduced by \$1,000,000) (increased by \$1,000,000)”.

AMENDMENT NO. 19 OFFERED BY MS. PETTERSEN OF COLORADO

Page 35, line 12, after the first dollar amount, insert “(reduced by \$10,000,000) (increased by \$10,000,000)”.

AMENDMENT NO. 20 OFFERED BY MS. ROSS OF NORTH CAROLINA

Page 35, line 12, after the dollar amount, insert “(increased by \$1,000,000) (reduced by \$1,000,000)”.

AMENDMENT NO. 22 OFFERED BY MR. OGLES OF TENNESSEE

Page 36, line 22, after the dollar amount, insert “(reduced by \$1,000,000) (increased by \$1,000,000)”.

AMENDMENT NO. 30 OFFERED BY MR. GOTTHEIMER OF NEW JERSEY

Page 39, line 23, after the dollar amount, insert “(reduced by \$1,000,000) (increased by \$1,000,000)”.

AMENDMENT NO. 31 OFFERED BY MS. TLAIB OF MICHIGAN

Page 39, line 23, after the dollar amount, insert “(reduced by \$5,000,000)”.

Page 47, line 22, after the dollar amount, insert “(increased by \$5,000,000)”.

AMENDMENT NO. 32 OFFERED BY MR. ZINKE OF MONTANA

Page 40, line 18, after the dollar amount, insert “(reduced by \$5,000,000)”.

Page 40, line 19, after the dollar amount, insert “(reduced by \$5,000,000)”.

Page 47, line 22, after the dollar amount, insert “(increased by \$5,000,000)”.

AMENDMENT NO. 33 OFFERED BY MR. MOLINARO OF NEW YORK

Page 42, line 5, after the dollar amount, insert “(reduced by 1,000,000) (increased by 1,000,000)”.

AMENDMENT NO. 23 OFFERED BY MS. PEREZ OF WASHINGTON

Page 37, line 12, after the dollar amount, insert “(reduced by \$1,000,000) (increased by \$1,000,000)”.

AMENDMENT NO. 25 OFFERED BY MRS. BOEBERT OF COLORADO

Page 38, line 18, after the dollar amount, insert “(increased by \$3,000,000)”.

Page 39, line 23, after the dollar amount, insert “(reduced by \$5,500,000)”.

AMENDMENT NO. 26 OFFERED BY MRS. BOEBERT OF COLORADO

Page 39, line 9, after the dollar amount, insert “(increased by \$2,000,000)”.

Page 39, line 23, after the dollar amount, insert “(reduced by \$3,500,000)”.

AMENDMENT NO. 27 OFFERED BY MRS. BOEBERT OF COLORADO

Page 39, line 23, after the dollar amount, insert “(reduced by \$3,500,000)”.

Page 40, line 5, dollar amount, insert “(increased by \$2,000,000)”.

AMENDMENT NO. 28 OFFERED BY MRS. BOEBERT OF COLORADO

Page 39, line 23, after the dollar amount, insert “(reduced by \$3,500,000)”.

Page 48, line 5, after the dollar amount, insert “(increased by \$2,000,000)”.

AMENDMENT NO. 29 OFFERED BY MRS. BOEBERT OF COLORADO

Page 39, line 23, after the dollar amount, insert “(reduced by \$3,500,000)”.

Page 47, line 22, after the dollar amount, insert “(increased by \$2,000,000)”.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 614, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. CARTER) and the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) each will control 10 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Mr. Chairman, these are noncontroversial amendments and are supported by both sides.

Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of this amendment. It includes 28 amendments: 2 bipartisan, 14 for Republicans, and 12 for Democrats. I am glad to see that we can at least come together around certain aspects of this bill to support our veteran servicemembers and their families and the leadership of colleagues on both sides of the aisle.

Mr. Chair, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Chairman, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from Washington (Ms. PEREZ), who is here as an advocate on behalf of her constituents serving in the military as well as our veterans.

Ms. PEREZ. Mr. Chair, I rise in support of the amendments en bloc.

Following recent meetings with veterans in Lewis County, I am deeply concerned about a number of issues impacting constituent veterans who receive care through the VA Puget Sound Healthcare System.

First and foremost, veterans in Lewis County have seen their access to care reduced dramatically in recent years.

The 2021 closure of the Chehalis Community Based Outpatient Clinic cut many veterans off from nearby care. Travel times went from about 1 hour to more than 2 hours to get to a VA Puget Sound facility. Not just that, but the wait times are horrific. I am hearing from veterans that they are waiting at times over 6 hours on the phone for it to be answered.

In rural communities with sparse specialty and mental health care options to begin with, the closure of a full CBOC has put lifesaving care out of reach of our veterans.

I offered two amendments that are included in the amendments en bloc that will hold the VA accountable for protecting access to care for veterans in rural areas like mine in east Lewis County.

Amendment No. 15 would require the VA to submit a report to Congress on their efforts to ensure access to healthcare for veterans residing in geographic proximity to a Department of Veteran Affairs community-based outpatient clinic subject to closure.

Amendment No. 23 will require the VA to update Patient Experience Compare Data published on their public website to break down data by county. This would give our body and Americans valuable insight about how the patient experience with a medical center may differ based on location within the center's jurisdiction, not just the jurisdiction broadly. We can compare whether it is a rural issue or an issue with the center itself.

In return for their service to our country, we have made a promise to our veterans that we must uphold. It is our responsibility to ensure they have the access to healthcare necessary to lead a full and healthy life after their time in the armed services has ended.

Mr. Chair, I ask for support for these two amendments that will help increase transparency and hold the VA accountable for access to care for my constituents and other vets in rural areas.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Chairman, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON), who is here to stand up to make sure that our veterans get access to legal care.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Chairman, this amendment would allow the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to provide support to law school clinical programs and provide pro bono legal and support services to veterans, including assistance with disability claims and appeals and foreclosures. The House passed this amendment last year.

There are already at least 22 law schools that have clinics devoted to veterans' legal needs, including William and Mary Law School Veterans Benefits Clinic, which serves as a national model for this idea and was the first recipient of the “best practice” award for the VA.

There are many other law schools, such as the University of the District of Columbia's David A. Clarke School of Law that are interested in starting their own VA certified clinics. More needs to be done to sustain and increase the number of these programs.

I was a tenured professor of law and continued to teach a seminar after being elected to Congress. I saw the expert attention that clinical programs provide their clients.

Mr. Chair, I urge my colleagues to support this amendment, a concrete measure that would assist our veterans who put their lives on the line for this country.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Chairman, I support the amendments en bloc, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendments en bloc offered by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. CARTER).

The en bloc amendments were agreed to.

The Acting CHAIR. The Chair understands that amendment No. 21 will not be offered.

AMENDMENT NO. 24 OFFERED BY MR. BERGMAN

The Acting CHAIR. It is now in order to consider amendment No. 24 printed in House Report 118-158.

Mr. BERGMAN. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Page 38, line 18, after the dollar amount, insert "(reduced by \$20,000,000) (increased by \$20,000,000)".

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 614, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. BERGMAN) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Michigan.

Mr. BERGMAN. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself 1 minute.

Mr. Chair, I rise in strong support of my amendment to H.R. 4366.

This amendment will ensure the VA conducts large-scale studies into the efficacy of drugs with FDA breakthrough therapy status to treat post-traumatic stress disorder through medication-assisted therapy trials.

□ 1545

Every day, roughly 20 veterans take their own life. This number has stayed high despite our best efforts here in Washington. Fortunately, new breakthrough therapies have offered significant help.

Under the Trump administration, the FDA granted breakthrough therapy status for MDMA-assisted therapy to treat PTSD. Since then, privately funded research has demonstrated clear, positive results in treating previously untreatable PTSD with little or no risk for patients.

This includes studies in cooperation with the VA, for instance, at the Bronx VA hospital.

Let me be clear. These trials are conducted with full FDA approval, under medical supervision, and in safe clinical environments.

The Acting CHAIR. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. BERGMAN. Mr. Chair, I yield myself an additional 1 minute.

Additionally, Mr. Chair, because these medications are only ever administered directly in-person and in a clinical setting by medical professionals, there is no potential for misuse.

It is now time for the VA to do its part to expand research into these lifesaving therapies and refine best practices for our treatment for our veterans.

If psychedelic-assisted therapy can help treat a veteran's PTSD or prevent them from taking their own life, then we owe it to them to take an active role in researching these potentially lifesaving therapies.

Mr. Chair, I urge my colleagues to support this amendment, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. CORREA. Mr. Chair, I claim the time in opposition, although I am not opposed.

The Acting CHAIR. Without objection, the gentleman from California is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. CORREA. Mr. Chair, I also rise in strong support of the Bergman-Correa amendment.

This amendment will push the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the VA, to carry our large-scale studies into drugs like psilocybin, MDMA, and others which have been designated as breakthrough therapies by the Food and Drug Administration.

Why? It is because we owe it to our veterans.

Mr. Chair, what you have to do is listen to veterans' testimonies—veterans who have the invisible scars from the wounds they brought back from the battlefield—and their challenges, psychological challenges. Psilocybin promises up to 80 percent success after one treatment of a veteran's challenge, and, today, as the law stands, these veterans have to go outside the country to get treatment.

That is no way, Mr. Chair, to treat our veterans.

Let's take care of business. Let's make sure the VA takes these tests and studies and brings back data so that we can create a program that takes care of our veterans.

Veterans have fought for our freedom. It is time that we continue and step up to fulfill our moral obligation to take care of them, as well.

Mr. Chair, I urge my colleagues to join us in voting "yes" on this amendment, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BERGMAN. Mr. Chair, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague and partner, Representative CORREA, for his remarks.

We have both worked long and hard on the commitment to our veterans in so many different ways. This is just one more example of Congress doing the right thing for our veterans.

This amendment will unlock potential treatments that have been shown to actually cure post-traumatic stress disorder, something current medicine and modern psychology have been unable to do; give our veterans a chance to live a long, happy life that we all take for granted.

Mr. Chair, I strongly urge all our Members to vote for our men and women—our heroes—who have served in uniform and to support the Bergman-Correa amendment, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. BERGMAN).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 34 OFFERED BY MS. GREENE OF GEORGIA

The Acting CHAIR. It is now in order to consider amendment No. 34 printed in House Report 118-158.

Ms. GREENE of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Page 52, beginning on line 18, strike "the Office of Resolution Management, Diversity and Inclusion".

Page 52, line 20, strike the comma.

Page 52, beginning on line 24, strike "\$86,481,000 for the Office of Resolution Management, Diversity and Inclusion."

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 614, the gentlewoman from Georgia (Ms. GREENE) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman.

Ms. GREENE of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, my amendment asks the House to support striking the funding for the Office of Resolution Management, Diversity and Inclusion.

The Office of Resolution Management, Diversity and Inclusion in the VA is charged with promoting woke DEI initiatives. My amendment would strike over \$86 million of funding for this woke office which provides training for VA employees to teach them about their implicit bias.

Just for you to understand what implicit bias means, Mr. Chairman, because it was something I had to look up myself, implicit bias—this is ACORN—implicit bias refers to a person's unconscious attitudes about other communities that can affect their behavior to those members.

Unconscious attitudes? We are funding \$86 million for people to be trained about things they feel that they don't know that they feel?

This makes absolutely no sense for the care of our great veterans.

Instead of spending millions of tax dollars on woke ideology, we should put that money toward making the VA

an agency that actually helps our heroes and our great veterans who served our military and our country and who desperately need good care.

When I am at home in my district and I speak to veterans there, that is what I hear them talk about to me constantly: is the care that they want to receive at the VA, but yet they are failed so many times?

Sick and injured veterans suffering with PTSD, depression, and mental illness and who are on the verge of suicide don't care if VA employees serving them have checked their White privilege. They just want to get the treatment that they need.

Just for some examples for the House to hear about the type of training that happens in this DEI department that is costing the American taxpayers \$86 million, a few examples are managing gender diversity in the VA, managing implicit bias—remember those are feelings you don't know you have—valuing workforce diversity in the workplace inclusion; participating effective diversity and inclusion in the workplace for managers, supervisors, and team leaders; understanding micro behaviors in the VA work environment.

It is time to put \$86 million to taking care of our veterans' healthcare needs. That is the right place to spend the money.

Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Chairman, I claim the time in opposition to the amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentlewoman from Florida is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Chairman, I rise in opposition to this amendment.

The VA strives to fairly represent and support the communities that it serves, and all veterans deserve equitable and fair access to the healthcare and benefits that they deserve. Diversity and inclusion foster a healthy workplace environment and promote equal opportunity through smart outreach, retention, and education.

Our veterans—despite the sponsor's denial of a more greatly diverse VA—increasingly are diverse themselves, and they deserve that.

The bill already rejected the budget request to fund the Office of Resolution Management, Diversity and Inclusion at the levels needed to support the department in 2024 and instead holds the office flat at the same funding level provided in 2023, and now this amendment seeks to eliminate the already inadequate funding in the bill entirely.

What is so threatening about the Office of Resolution Management, Diversity and Inclusion?

This office, among the many things it does, prevents harassment and discrimination problems.

I can't imagine why we wouldn't want to combat that, why we wouldn't to make sure that everybody is able to come to work or to be treated at the VA in an evenhanded and fair way.

It heads off costly legal problems for the VA and saves taxpayer money in the long term which I thought was something that our friends on the other side of the aisle are interested in.

I believe the real issue is that our friends on the other side of the aisle don't like the increasing diversity that is occurring in this country, and there is an effort underway as a result across all appropriations bills to excise that word and any policy related to it and to cut anything related to diversity regardless of the purpose and need of the office.

Mr. Chairman, this is an inherently discriminatory, unfair, and bigoted amendment. I urge my colleagues to oppose it, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. GREENE of Georgia. Mr. Chair, the great news for all of us here today is that the Constitution declared long ago that all of us are created equal. It is time that we started acknowledging that in all of our funding, in all of our departments, and all across America, and, as well, that our veterans are created equal. We don't have to spend \$86 million on educating everyone on how different they are. It is time to start treating everyone equally.

As far as sexual harassment claims, private businesses all across the country are able to handle these without having special diversity, equity, and inclusion departments to handle sexual harassment. That is usually handled in human resources or among managers who can handle the situation.

Management has always been a problem in the VA. We do not need to fund \$86 million creating a big, woke department that is actually already created. We should spend \$86 million, again, toward helping our veterans. Our veterans have enough issues they face.

Not too long ago there was a tragic story in Georgia where one of our veterans committed suicide while waiting for the care in the waiting office at the VA. This should never ever happen.

This type of funding, \$86 million, again, should not go towards educating people about gender and gender bias, educating people about their skin color, and educating people about how they think unconsciously without knowing how they think. These are the type of woke ideologies that divide and separate Americans and that veterans could care less about.

They care about the care that they will receive, they care about having their appointments, they care about their medical treatment, and they care about one another.

One of the things veterans care most about is the fact that they suffer with PTSD from all the foreign wars that they have been sent to and served in.

It is time we take better care of our veterans and stop dividing America with identity politics.

Mr. Chair, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. GREENE of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I yield 30 seconds to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MAST).

Mr. MAST. Mr. Chairman, I would say this: There is an attempt to divide the military.

We see each other as brothers and sisters in arms. I come from the military, and I can tell you this, Mr. Chairman: We don't care in the VA and we didn't care on the battlefield if the person carrying us on or the person whom we are carrying off is Black or Brown or White. We do have grooming standards, but I would say otherwise we don't care about the length of their hair or other things.

The left fundamentally despises, in my opinion, that the military is this last bastion of best man, best woman for the job that exists in our country, and they are doing everything that they can in the VA and in the military alike to insert themselves and create division that otherwise does not exist there.

Ms. GREENE of Georgia. Mr. Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from Georgia (Ms. GREENE).

The question was taken; and the Acting Chair announced that the ayes appeared to have it.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Chair, I demand a recorded vote.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, further proceedings on the amendment offered by the gentlewoman from Georgia will be postponed.

□ 1600

AMENDMENT NO. 35 OFFERED BY MR. BOST

The Acting CHAIR. It is now in order to consider amendment No. 35 printed in House Report 118-158.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title) insert the following:

SEC. 419. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to report a determination under section 5502 of title 38, United States Code, and section 3.353 of title 38 of the Code of Federal Regulations, to the Department of Justice National Instant Criminal Background Check System established pursuant to section 103 of the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act (34 U.S.C. 40901).

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 614, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois.

Mr. BOST. Madam Chair, I rise today in support of my amendment to H.R. 4366.

My amendment would prevent any funds under the act from being used to continue a VA current practice of sending a veteran's name to the FBI National Instant Criminal Background Check System, or the NICS list.

According to the VA rules, if a veteran or beneficiary is appointed a fiduciary to help manage their VA benefits, their name is automatically sent to the NICS list. VA sends the veteran's name without finding that veteran a danger to themselves or others, and this is not done in a court of law, not done by a judge, not done by any person with legal authority. It is only done by a VA bureaucrat.

A Federal employee currently has the right to take away a constitutional right of our veterans. The same veterans who protected our constitutional rights are now losing theirs because they need a bit of help managing their finances.

I have said this once, and I will say it again: Veterans should not be treated any differently from any other American citizen.

The mission of the VA is to care for those who have served. To me, it seems this practice is the opposite of caring for our veterans.

Veterans have told me that this practice is a barrier for them to seek healthcare. They are so afraid of losing their constitutional rights that they will not go to the VA for their healthcare or their benefits.

There were just under 15,000 individuals reported to NICS last fiscal year from the VA. This fiscal year, over 8,000 veterans have already been reported to the NICS so far. This practice must stop.

I am proud to have introduced my amendment that would prohibit the unlawful loss of a constitutional right of our veterans.

Madam Chair, I include in the RECORD letters of support for my amendment from The American Legion, Gun Owners of America, National Rifle Association, National Defense Committee, Vets 4 Vet Leadership, Veteran Warriors, and Catholic War Veterans.

THE AMERICAN LEGION,
July 20, 2023.

Hon. MIKE BOST,
House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

REPRESENTATIVE BOST: On behalf of the more than 1.6 million members of The American Legion, I am pleased to express support for amendment to H.R. 4366, the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. It is ironic that veterans, a community in which every member swore to uphold the Constitution of the United States, requires advocacy to maintain their constitutional right to bear arms. The American Legion believes that each veteran, regardless of disability, has the lawful right to possess firearms, unless deemed unfit by a judicial authority with the full benefit of due process. Any constitutional right should be protected with this same expectation of scrutiny.

The proposed amendment would prohibit the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) from sending information on veterans who are assisted by a fiduciary to the FBI's National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS), without a judicial ruling that they are a danger to themselves or others. As such, this amendment would prevent veterans from losing their Second Amend-

ment right to purchase or own a firearm because they receive help managing their VA benefits.

Through American Legion Resolution No. 118: Amend Title 38, United States Code, to Clarify the Treatment of a Veteran as Adjudicated Mentally Incompetent for Certain Purposes, The American Legion urges Congress to pass legislation which would prohibit VA "from transmitting in any form, findings about a veteran's mental status or ability to handle his or her own funds, to other agencies without the order or finding of a judge, magistrate, or other judicial authority of competent jurisdiction." The American Legion supports the proposed amendment. The American Legion sincerely appreciates your leadership on this issue and looks forward to working with you to secure the passage of this critical amendment.

For God & Country,
VINCENT J. "JIM" TROIOLA,
National Commander.

GUN OWNERS OF AMERICA,
July 18, 2023.

Hon. MIKE BOST,
Chairman, Committee on Veterans' Affairs,
House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN BOST: Gun Owners of America is thankful to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs for its focus on the lost gun rights of a quarter of a million veterans with its legislative hearing on H.R. 705, the Veterans' 2nd Amendment Protection Act.

GOA exists to protect the constitutionally recognized right to keep and bear arms of all Americans. Because our veterans have taken up arms to defend this country, we strongly believe that the Department of Veterans Affairs must respect that right. Yet, since the Clinton Administration and the invention of the NICS background check system, the VA has used its "fiduciary rule" to disarm veterans as if they had been "adjudicated as a mental defective" by a court and were now prohibited from possessing firearms under federal law.

Veterans who have risked life and limb and now suffer from the psychological consequences related to their service should receive the best mental health care our nation has to offer. But VA gun control measures, such as this "fiduciary rule" to arbitrarily report veterans to the NICS database, pose major barriers to care for gun owning veterans who may need life-saving mental health treatment.

Sadly, veterans are disproportionately "adjudicated" as mental defectives by the federal government. As of 3 January 2023, 97.8 percent of active 18 U.S.C. §9221(g)(4) records in the NICS system submitted by the federal government are veterans. Of the 266,804 records submitted to NICS by federal agencies pursuant to 18 U.S.C. §922(g)(4), 261,168 records were submitted by the VA.

The procedure of turning a veteran who cannot manage his or her checkbook into a prohibited person begins when a VA bureaucrat requires a fiduciary to administer benefit payments. The VA only notifies the veteran once at the initiation of the fiduciary appointment process. If the VA does not receive a response within 60 days of the issuance of this notification, the VA makes a determination of competency based only on the evidence of record and the veteran's record is submitted to the NICS database. Thus, a veteran may lose the legal right to possess or obtain firearms without committing any crime, without the constitutional due process necessary for the deprivation of a right, and sometimes without the veteran's full knowledge or consent.

It is essential that Congress immediately pass the Veterans 2nd Amendment Protection Act to prohibit the Department of Vet-

erans Affairs (VA) from disarming any more veterans with its unconstitutional "fiduciary rule" process. Congress must also restore the Second Amendment rights of the veterans currently prohibited from possessing firearms because the VA has submitted their name to the FBI's background check system.

GOA fully endorses Chairman Bost's Amendment to H.R. 4366—to include the Veterans 2nd Amendment Protection Act to the Military, Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2024.

In Liberty,

AIDAN JOHNSTON,
Director of Federal Affairs.

NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION
OF AMERICA,
Washington, DC, July 19, 2023.

DEAR CHAIRMAN BOST: The National Rifle Association (NRA) applauds your amendment to H.R. 4366, to prevent the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) from stripping veterans' Second Amendment rights without due process.

For decades, VA has been using an entitlement program as a pretext to revoke a fundamental constitutional right from those it vows to serve. Under the current scheme, appointment of a fiduciary—a bureaucratic decision assessing a beneficiary's ability to handle personal finances—is treated as an "adjudication" of "mental defectiveness." This results in the reporting of these veterans to the FBI's National Instant Criminal Background Check System as disqualified from firearm ownership and acquisition, even though that finding does not involve a judge or a hearing to establish whether the individuals are dangerous to themselves or others.

No government bureaucrat should have the unilateral and arbitrary power to strip any American of their gun rights. Therefore, on behalf of millions of NRA members across the country—many of whom have served this great nation in uniform—the NRA fully supports this amendment as well as your companion legislation, H.R. 705, the Veterans' Second Amendment Protection Act.

Sincerely,

RANDY KOZUCH,
Executive Director, NRA-ILA.

JULY 26, 2023.

Hon. KEVIN MCCARTHY,
Speaker of the House.
Hon. STEVE SCALISE,
Majority Leader of the House.
Hon. JIM MCGOVERN,
Ranking Member, House Committee on Rules.

Hon. HAKEEM JEFFRIES,
Minority Leader of the House.
Hon. TOM COLE,
Chair, House Committee on Rules.

DEAR SPEAKER MCCARTHY, LEADERS JEFFRIES AND SCALISE, CHAIR COLE, AND REPRESENTATIVE MCGOVERN: We, the undersigned veteran and military serving organizations, endorse the inclusion in the House Committee on Rules' reported Rule on H.R. 4366, the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2024, of the Rules Committee Amendment 23, Version 2—sponsored by Representative Bost of Illinois—to prohibit "the VA from using funds to submit a beneficiary's name to the NICS list based on VA's appointment of a fiduciary." We also endorse the amendment's adoption by the House into the final House-passed version of the bill.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA's) Fiduciary program is a testament to the threat the unchecked regulatory powers of the Executive Branch can pose to the inalienable rights of the People, in this case, to the rights of disabled veterans to due

process under the law, and to keep and bear arms. From the Fiduciary program's placing the burden of proof on the veteran to prove they are competent (and not on the VA to prove the veteran is incompetent), to the lack of judicial oversight to the process (as is provided in similar incompetency determinations by the Social Security Administration), to the then Orwellian process by which the VA tattles to the Department of Justice that the veteran has problems balancing their checkbook, and therefore now somehow qualifies as a "mental defective" under the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act of 1993 and loses their right to keep and bear arms, all without any judicial action, this program is rife with threats to the liberty and property of the very men and women who sacrificed their physical well being in the defense of this country.

Furthermore, the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine found 55 percent of those Iraq and Afghanistan veterans needing mental health services did not seek VA care. The National Academies further stated a significant reason these veterans are not seeking these mental health care services is because of the fear they will lose their firearms, or other legal or administrative actions will be taken against them for seeking mental health care such as loss of security clearance, loss of child custody, and with 35 percent of those interviewed by the National Academy saying "the potential of having their personal firearms taken away as an obstacle to use VA mental health services." And given the rate of increase in veteran suicides over the last 20 years is almost 240 percent higher for those veterans not in the VA's mental health care programs than those in it, such disincentives to seek VA mental health care, such as the Fiduciary Rule, appear to be increasing veteran suicide, not decreasing it.

While we believe the entire VA Fiduciary program must be fundamentally reformed to address the significant civil and legal right abuses the Fiduciary program itself represents for America's veterans, given the legislative process that will require, we believe the Fiscal Year 2024 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act should contain this prohibition on any funds being expended by the VA to involuntarily place any veteran into the Fiduciary program.

Very Respectfully,

NATIONAL DEFENSE
COMMITTEE.
VETS 4 VET LEADERSHIP.
VETERAN WARRIORS.
CATHOLIC WAR VETERANS.

Mr. BOST. Madam Chair, I thank Representatives ROSENDALE, HUDSON, DESJARLAIS, SELF, CAMMACK, HIGGINS, OGLES, MILLER, BOEBERT, VAN ORDEN, and KIGGANS for joining me on this amendment.

Madam Chair, I encourage all of my colleagues to support this amendment, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair, I claim the time in opposition to the amendment.

The Acting CHAIR (Mrs. MILLER of West Virginia). The gentlewoman from Florida is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair, during the process of applying for disability benefits, VA determines whether or not a beneficiary can manage their own financial affairs. If not, VA will assign them a fiduciary to protect the veteran.

VA will only determine an individual to be unable to manage his or her fi-

nancial affairs after receipt of medical documentation or if a court of competent jurisdiction has already made that determination.

In assigning a fiduciary, VA must also report the beneficiary to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, the NICS system, as, under the law, they are adjudicated as mentally defective. This reporting prevents the beneficiary under Federal law from purchasing a firearm.

The program has a full due process system, and veterans can file an appeal. This is an example of generating a controversy where there is none.

The process of applying for disability benefits is entirely separate from the processes by which veterans receive VA healthcare. The Veterans Health Administration, which handles disability benefits, does not take away veterans' firearms.

However, by implying that VA bureaucrats are going to take guns away from veterans, this amendment not only does nothing to increase access to care but its very introduction seeks to dissuade veterans from even seeking healthcare that they have earned in the first place.

Moreover, this amendment deals with an authorizing issue and should not be debated on an appropriations bill. This is policy, not funding.

Madam Chair, I urge my colleagues to oppose this amendment, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Madam Chair, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I am glad that was brought up, the claim that the bureaucrats do not do this. It is only the bureaucrats that recommend to the NICS list, and then the Department of Justice does this. They take away a right of a veteran where any other citizen in this United States would have to go before a court of law where they would be found to be a danger to themselves or others.

Yet, our VA, under the interpretation that they have made of an existing law, has decided that they will have a bureaucrat, without due process, take away the rights of our veterans. It is as simple as that.

When I came here to this House, I found this out. As a veteran, I was appalled. What bothers me more than anything is the number of veterans across the central part of this United States who choose not to seek VA help for the fear that they would lose that Second Amendment right. They fought for that right and every other right under this Constitution.

This needs to be straightened out. It is not gun control. It is not any issue like that. This is a veterans rights issue.

Madam Chair, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair, I yield 2½ minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO), the distinguished ranking member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Chair, VA is required by law to transmit the names of the VA beneficiaries to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, which prevents them from buying a firearm, but let me make one thing abundantly clear. Under no circumstances has VA ever confiscated anyone's firearms.

Seeking mental health care from the Veterans Health Administration will not result in a veteran's firearms being taken away. VA does not have legal authority to do so. Only under a discrete set of circumstances for a very discrete population does the Veterans Health Administration report veterans to NICS.

Madam Chair, the stigma around seeking mental health care at VA is a real one. It is also a multifaceted problem we are trying to tackle. Partisan stunts like this amendment make that fight more difficult because it leads to misinformation about the fiduciary program, a program meant to protect vulnerable veterans and beneficiaries.

We had a legislative hearing on Representative BOST's bill on this topic, and it was abundantly clear that there were problems with that bill. My colleagues are attempting to go this route, through the appropriations process, which is harmful because it strips money from VA for political purposes.

Madam Chair, when we discussed this bill last week in the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, we also learned of a great deal of concern about due process, but let me be clear on this point. There are already six avenues for review and relief that beneficiaries can use to challenge VA's determinations and remove their names from the NICS list. However, those avenues are not widely used.

In fact, I would challenge the chairman to show me where there is any veteran with standing that would even take this case to the Federal court to challenge the whole process at VA.

There are six avenues of review and relief. There is due process. What is the problem that this amendment is really trying to address?

As I said in committee, Madam Chair, no one on our side of the aisle asserts that the fiduciary program is infallible. No policy or program is. However, any change to a program or policy must be evidence based and data driven.

In the case of VA's fiduciary program, a program designed to protect the most vulnerable veterans from both financial and physical harm, we must be especially careful not to put more veterans at risk.

Democrats are more than willing to have a debate on the merits of this program under those parameters, but this amendment is purely a political exercise that only seeks to put more veterans at risk by perpetuating stigma around mental health care, and it undermines the VA's efforts at suicide prevention.

Mr. BOST. Madam Chair, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Madam Chair, I will answer two quick questions.

The fact is that, no, the VA employee does not take the Second Amendment right and possess the guns. The Department of Justice does. They give the name to the Department of Justice.

Two, when the statement was made that I have a bill to try to deal with this, the ranking member was totally correct. I do because I am going to do everything I can to make sure that the rights of our veterans are not taken away.

It is time for us to stand up for our veterans and protect the constitutional rights that they fought to protect. No veteran should lose their Second Amendment right without due process of law.

Madam Chair, I urge my colleagues to join me in support of this amendment, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair, may I inquire as to how much time is remaining.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentlewoman from Florida has 1 minute remaining.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair, let me make clear that the Department of Veterans Affairs has robust due process policies and regulations in place for incompetency determinations and remind our colleagues that one of the three ways in which someone is denied an opportunity to possess a firearm is when they have been declared mentally incompetent.

There are very robust provisions in the processes at the VA to ensure that there is due process in place. On top of that, the VA has the ability to grant relief from disability in the event that clear and convincing evidence is presented that affirmatively, substantially, and specifically shows that the beneficiary is not likely to act in a manner dangerous to the public and that granting relief will not be contrary to the public interest.

That is the kind of safety measure that we want, to make sure that when a veteran has been declared mentally incompetent, Madam Chair, that they are not able to get access to a firearm.

Due process is important. Protecting the public and the individual is important, as well.

Madam Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST).

The question was taken; and the Acting Chair announced that the ayes appeared to have it.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair, I demand a recorded vote.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, further proceedings on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Illinois will be postponed.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Madam Chair, I rise as the designee of the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. GRANGER).

Madam Chair, I move to strike the last word.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Madam Chair, I yield to the gentlewoman from Colorado (Mrs. BOEBERT).

Mrs. BOEBERT. Madam Chair, I rise in favor of the en bloc amendment package, which includes six of my amendments that redirect funds from Biden's bloated bureaucracy to actually help our Nation's veterans.

Our men and women in uniform and our Nation's veterans put everything on the line to defend this great country and our freedoms. They deserve the best care that America has to offer.

Caring for our veterans should be a priority in our annual funding bills. That is why I drafted these amendments that transfer dollars from the Federal bureaucracy to provide additional resources for veterans, including veteran mental health programs, medical and prosthetic research, the Board of Veterans' Appeals to help reduce its backlog and process veterans claims more quickly, gravesites for veterans in areas where a veteran cannot be buried in a VA national cemetery, construction of State extended care facilities, the Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program, and veterans telehealth and rural health.

Don't believe the lies on the other side of the aisle. The Republican majority is committed to fully funding our veterans healthcare programs and funding veterans benefits and VA programs.

Earlier this year, they falsely claimed that the Limit, Save, Grow Act would cut veterans benefits, even though it didn't even mention veterans in the bill.

The White House and the leftists falsely tried to claim that this bill cut veterans benefits before it was even released. We didn't even have the text yet.

Let me say this again: This bill fully funds our veterans and even provides an increase of \$1.5 billion above the discretionary funding level contained in the fiscal year 2023 bill drafted by Democrats.

The only thing this bill cuts is wasteful spending, and it ensures the Department can no longer be politicized by putting veterans and their needs above a rainbow flag or pronouns.

My support for our servicemembers does not end when their service is complete. I am committed to ensuring that our Nation's most precious resource, its sons and daughters and mothers and fathers who answered the call to serve in uniform receive the essential healthcare and benefits they have earned.

I applaud the committee for taking on this difficult task of prioritizing limited resources for our veterans.

Madam Chair, I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of my amendments, as well as the underlying bill, which fully funds our veterans.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Madam Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

□ 1615

AMENDMENT NO. 36 OFFERED BY MR. MAST

The Acting CHAIR. It is now in order to consider amendment No. 36 printed in House Report 118-158.

Mr. MAST. Madam Chair, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title) insert the following:

SEC. 419. None of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available to the Department of Veterans Affairs in this Act may be used to enforce Veterans Health Directive 1315 as it relates to—

(1) the policy stating that “VHA providers are prohibited from completing forms or registering Veterans for participation in a State-approved marijuana program”;

(2) the directive for the “Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management” to ensure that “medical facility Directors are aware that it is VHA policy for providers to assess Veteran use of marijuana but providers are prohibited from recommending, making referrals to or completing paperwork for Veteran participation in State marijuana programs”;

(3) the directive for the “VA Medical Facility Director” to ensure that “VA facility staff are aware of the following” “[t]he prohibition on recommending, making referrals to or completing forms and registering Veterans for participation in State-approved marijuana programs”.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 614, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MAST) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida.

Mr. MAST. Madam Chair, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise today in support of a bipartisan amendment to do something simple: give veterans access to every possible tool when it comes to the wounds of war, of which I am innately familiar.

The amendment is quite simple. It allows VA doctors in States with legal medical cannabis programs to discuss cannabis as a treatment option with their patients. I say this as clearly as I can: I have friends who are Rangers, Green Berets, and SEALs. I have seen pilots and every other job in the military sometimes find relief from the drugs, the narcotics that they have been prescribed in the VA or in the hospital. They find relief from both mental and physical wounds that they face.

However, what they face as well is a Department of Veterans Affairs that does not allow their primary care physicians, their post-deployment clinics to discuss the medical treatment options and work with them through the paperwork for those medical treatment options that are actually available in their States. If they are not working with their doctors to do that, then you have to ask yourself, who is it that they would be working with to do that for medical treatment that is legal in their State?

This amendment, again, would change that and make it the case that the Department of Veterans Affairs can assist those veterans for whom it is appropriate and recommended by their doctors that medical cannabis be a treatment option.

Madam Chair, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Madam Chair, I rise in opposition to this amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Madam Chair, I understand the intent and that some States permit the use of marijuana. However, the VA doctors are required to comply with Federal law. This amendment does not address that. I don't want to put them in legal jeopardy. I believe this should be handled by the authorizing committee.

Madam Chair, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MAST. Madam Chair, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER).

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Madam Chair, I appreciate the gentleman's courtesy and his leadership.

I am proud to lead this amendment with the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MAST), the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. JOYCE), and the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE) to inject some sanity into our medical marijuana approach.

Veterans in Oregon and across the country have shared powerful stories with me about how medical cannabis has saved their lives and given them relief from wounds of war seen and unseen. These veterans have also shared their fear about what would happen if they worked with the VA doctors to incorporate their cannabis use into their treatment plans.

The VA denies veterans access to this care option by preventing providers from completing forms in compliance with State medical marijuana programs. This is a shameful disservice to the men and women who put their lives on the line. The VA is forcing veterans to seek care outside the VA or self-medicate.

Our veterans are paying the price for Congress' failure to act. That is why I am proud to join Representative MAST in leading the Veterans Equal Access Act and why I call on my colleagues to support this amendment. Simple justice for our veterans.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Madam Chair, I yield such time as she may consume to the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ).

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair, I think it is important to make clear that this debate is not about whether veterans in a State where it is legal can get access to marijuana. It is not even about whether doctors at the VA can communicate about those options with their patients because they can. VA already does that. We allowed that several years ago.

What it does do and what this debate is about is to ensure that because marijuana is still an illegal substance under Federal law, if we allow this amendment to pass, it would potentially put VA employees, healthcare providers and other VA employees at risk of DEA enforcement actions. That is not something that we can change with this amendment, no matter how much you might want to have this amendment move forward.

While some States might have legalized marijuana for medical purposes and allow physicians to prescribe it to patients, VA providers are still subject to Federal enforcement actions through the Drug Enforcement Administration. The VA has policies in place prohibiting physicians from completing forms, not from communicating with their patients, and they can't register veterans in a State medical marijuana program themselves. However, veterans certainly can register themselves to do that.

There is a concern that if legislation forced the VA to change or stop enforcing its policies, as this amendment is proposing, in the absence of systemic changes to Federal drug policy outside the VA that providers could be at risk of penalties or other legal action.

The proper place for this discussion, Madam Chair, is in the authorizing committee, which my colleague, the sponsor of the amendment serves on. Have a discussion and a debate over policy to change the Federal enforcement action risk that we would be placing VA employees in if this amendment moved forward. Move it to the Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee and prohibit DEA enforcement action.

This debate is happening in the wrong bill on the wrong topic. I oppose the amendment for that reason, while separately not opposing the idea that there are legal ways that veterans are able to get access to cannabis and marijuana. However, we do have to make sure we can continue to allow VA employees to be protected from prosecution as a result of the potential impact that this amendment would have.

Mr. MAST. Madam Chair, may I inquire how much time I have remaining?

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman has 2 minutes remaining.

Mr. MAST. Madam Chair, I yield myself 1 minute, just to point out that my colleague from Florida from the other side is quite literally wrong.

VHA Directive 1315 says this plainly: VHA providers are prohibited from completing forms or registering veterans for participation in State-approved marijuana programs. It says it very literally.

My colleague is saying that, no, doctors can talk to them about this, and they can deal with it. No, if a doctor can't help them with the forms and help them with registering and help them with the dosages and the

amounts and everything that goes on with a very specific medical policy, then that is a pretty confusing conversation for somebody to have if they can't take it to that level.

Madam Chair, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. JOYCE).

Mr. JOYCE of Ohio. Madam Chair, I am proud to join my colleagues in leading this commonsense effort to help our country's veterans access medical treatment.

Research has shown that medical cannabis can be a safe and effective treatment in targeted pain management for PTSD which, unfortunately, impacts many of our veterans. Despite their efficiency, bureaucratic red tape continues to deny veterans these life-altering treatments. In States like Ohio and 37 others where it is legal, the Federal Government should not prevent a VA doctor from recommending medical cannabis as a viable treatment option if they believe it will help their patient.

As the son of a WWII veteran who was wounded and left for dead on the battlefield, I have seen firsthand the many challenges our Nation's heroes face when they return home. We should all resolve to help expand access to treatments for the medical challenges, both mental and physical, our veterans experience.

That is why I ask my colleagues to support this amendment to help eliminate barriers for alternative treatments and provide our veterans with the care they need to overcome the wounds of war.

Mr. MAST. Madam Chair, I yield myself the balance of my time to close.

Again, I point out the merits of this: It is fact in the VA right now the cannabis policy is extremely confusing. It does very literally say VHA providers are prohibited from completing forms or registering veterans for participation in State-approved marijuana programs.

Those are conversations that you need to have with your primary care physician, nurse practitioners, and others. This is the reason that that policy needs to be changed. I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Madam Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. LEE of California. Madam Chair, as Co-chair of the Congressional Cannabis Caucus, I rise in strong support of this bipartisan amendment No. 36, to the Fiscal Year 2024 Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies bill. This amendment would help veterans participate in a legal state medical cannabis program, ensure services are not denied, or limit health care providers' ability to make appropriate recommendations of this treatment option for veterans.

Currently, VA physicians aren't allowed to complete medical forms relating to their patients' cannabis usage nor can they assist their patients in enrolling in medical cannabis programs.

This amendment would authorize VA physicians and other health care providers to provide recommendations and opinions regarding

the use of medical cannabis to veterans who live in states with existing medical programs.

Millions of American veterans suffer from post-traumatic stress and depression. Moreover, of the nearly one million veterans who receive opioids to treat painful conditions, more than half continue to consume beyond 90 days.

Time after time, data has revealed that the mortality rate from opiate overdoses among VA patients is nearly double the national average. In states where patients can legally access medical cannabis to treat painful conditions, often as a less addictive alternative, the hands of VA physicians should not be tied.

Cannabis is currently legal in most states and territories for medicinal or adult use and the VA health system must keep up. I am proud to co-lead this amendment and want to give a special thanks to my Cannabis Caucus Co-chairs, Representatives MAST, BLUMENAUER and JOYCE, for their partnership on enacting comprehensive cannabis reform.

I urge my colleagues to vote and support this bipartisan, common-sense amendment that would benefit our armed service members.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MAST).

The amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 37 OFFERED BY MR. ROSENDALE

The Acting CHAIR. It is now in order to consider amendment No. 37 printed in House Report 118-158.

Mr. ROSENDALE. Madam Chair, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

Add at the end of the bill (before the spending reduction account) the following new section:

SEC. _____. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to enforce any COVID-19 mask mandates.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 614, the gentleman from Montana (Mr. ROSENDALE) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Montana.

Mr. ROSENDALE. Madam Chair, I rise today in support of my amendment, amendment No. 37, which would prohibit the use of funds made available by this act from being used to enforce any COVID-19 mask mandates.

Our country sends young men and women overseas for long periods of time, away from their family and friends at great risk to their physical safety. When they come home and become veterans, sometimes the VA refuses them the care that they have earned and that they deserve. This is unacceptable.

I have heard from numerous veterans in my district who have been denied care over their unwillingness to wear a mask to protect them from a pandemic that has long been declared over, using a method that has long since been refuted.

Denying a veteran medical care over a personal decision is outrageous. We

owe it to care for our Nation's heroes and to provide them with the best possible care, not stigmatize them over masking decisions.

The COVID-19 mask mandates are also unfair to the employees of the VA. Most employees want to provide veterans with world-class healthcare, not enforce arbitrary, unscientific rules. The VA did loosen its COVID-19 mask requirements recently. However, they left too much discretion to unelected bureaucrats. Again, the pandemic has long been over, and it is time to end all of the COVID-19 mandates.

Madam Chair, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair, I claim the time in opposition to the gentleman's amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentlewoman from Florida is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair, this amendment would prohibit the enforcement of any COVID-19 mask mandates. However, the VA has already relaxed mask mandates except in high-risk areas where patients could be put in danger by someone who has a respiratory infection.

For example, the VA continues to require masks near chemotherapy units, transplant units, and emergency rooms. In other words, this amendment would override safety precautions put in place for the VA's most at-risk patients.

It would block masking requirements near chemotherapy patients, whose immune systems have been brutally weakened by treatments to fight cancer. It would block masking requirements in the vicinity of surgery patients, where a dangerous respiratory virus could be deadly. It would block masking requirements near intensive care units filled with patients with severe, life-threatening illnesses.

This amendment is reckless, and it would endanger the lives of our most vulnerable patients at the VA. This amendment is not about a mask mandate at the office, it is not about a mask mandate at the grocery store. This amendment would block mask requirements at VA hospitals and healthcare facilities. How ludicrous could anything be?

□ 1630

It is astonishing that the gentleman would suggest that, in a hospital setting, around vulnerable individuals, particularly those that are extremely vulnerable, that we would be prohibiting a hospital from requiring people to wear masks so that people don't die of an illness contracted as a result of being exposed to someone who might be carrying germs that they are not aware of.

Our veterans have sacrificed so much for this country. It is our responsibility to protect their health, not to risk their lives for a political stunt.

Madam Chair, I urge my colleagues to oppose the amendment, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. ROSENDALE. Madam Chair, unfortunately the Representative is either mistaken or intentionally spreading false information. Any parts or portions of the facility that previously had mask mandates for immune deficiencies or any other reasons would not be impacted by this mandate. Only mandates that are a direct result of COVID-19 are prohibited.

Madam Chair, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Texas, (Mr. SELF).

Mr. SELF. Madam Chair, I rise today in support of Mr. ROSENDALE's amendment to remove mask mandates from our Veterans Affairs facilities.

Last April, President Joe Biden signed the Pandemic Is Over Act into law to decisively end the COVID-19 national emergency. Accordingly, hospitals and clinics across the country have rescinded their policies requiring visitors and patients to wear a mask.

However, VA clinics continue to enforce the so-called sensitive areas policy where patients must wear a mask while sitting in a meeting room waiting on his or her doctor. There is no reason for the VA to continue with this frivolous charade. Enough of the drama.

I urge my colleagues to support this amendment.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. ROSENDALE. Madam Chair, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Chair, the medical center leadership, the leadership, will determine when it is appropriate to transition from standard to enhanced safety practices. This is the problem.

Bureaucrats are continuing to make decisions, not about sensitive areas, not about areas where we are prone to have immune deficiencies, but simply sensitive areas, and recommended national response by a team of subject matter experts due to future COVID-19 variants that threaten veteran staff and safety. This is not acceptable.

Again, COVID-19 is over. These mask mandates as a result of COVID-19 need to be eliminated.

Madam Chair, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair, I am prepared to close. I reserve the balance my time.

Mr. ROSENDALE. Madam Chair, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Madam Chair, this amendment simply eliminates use of funds by the VA for the implementation of any COVID-19 mandates and is long overdue. I ask my colleagues to support this amendment and restore the proper treatment of our veterans.

Madam Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Extreme MAGA Republicans are once again trying to prevent people—trying to make sure that we have more people get sick rather than fewer.

In a hospital setting, with medical experts, neither of whom have spoken on this amendment today, it is imperative that we listen to medical experts.

When you are in an intensive care unit, when you are receiving chemotherapy, when you are in a medically risky situation, ensuring that the people around you that come in from the outside don't get you sick and potentially risk you severe illness and death, that is a responsible medical policy.

What Republicans are proposing is to make sure that the VA can't keep its patients safe. That is irresponsible, in the name of the extreme MAGA opposition to doing anything to ensure that people don't get COVID. The stunning irresponsibility is surprising, even for them.

Madam Chair, I urge my colleagues to oppose the amendment, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Montana (Mr. ROSENDALE).

The question was taken; and the Acting Chair announced that the ayes appeared to have it.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair, I demand a recorded vote.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, further proceedings on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Montana will be postponed.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Madam Chair, as the designee of the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. GRANGER), I move to strike the last word.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentleman is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Madam Chair, I yield to the gentleman from New York (Mr. MOLINARO).

Mr. MOLINARO. Madam Chair, I will speak briefly to two amendments that were included in the MILCON appropriations bill.

Specifically, one, amendment 24 ensures the funding for Veterans Health Administration, it ensures that we are dedicated to assisting veterans with disabilities and those with mental health and substance abuse challenges. Of course, as a Nation, we owe a great deal of gratitude to these men and women, and regardless of whether these are emotional or physical scars, this amendment ensures that we continue to provide appropriate access.

Additionally, amendment 25 ensures funding for the VA electronic health records which, of course, is critically important to our veterans, that we continue to modernize the system to help transitioning veterans access and receive top-quality care at VA facilities.

At the same time, we need to ensure the safety and effectiveness of updating this program. The VA and Congress must work in lockstep to create a system that better serves our veterans and taxpayers.

Madam Chair, I thank my colleagues for consideration of these amendments.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Madam Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

AMENDMENT NO. 38 OFFERED BY MR. ROY

The Acting CHAIR. It is now in order to consider amendment No. 38 printed in of House Report 118-158.

Mr. ROY. Madam Chair, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title) insert the following:

SEC. 419. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to carry out VHA Directive 1193.01, "Coronavirus Disease 2019 Vaccination Program for Veterans Health Administration Health Care Personnel".

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 614, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. ROY) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. ROY. Madam Chair, this amendment that I am offering prohibits any of the funding in the MILCON-VA appropriations bill from being used to carry out what I believe are unnecessary and unscientific COVID-19 vaccine mandates at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Now, there has been some confusion about this. Some people have said, oh, well, that is not really still going on. Well, I just got an email from the VA today saying, yes, it is.

There still are vaccine mandates that are being carried out at the VA and, to the best of my knowledge, it is the last remaining Federal vaccine mandate, and it needs to end.

Most Federal vaccine mandates ended in May of 2023, with the end of the public health emergency. The VA, though, was one of the few agencies to leave the mandate in place.

VHA Directive 1193.01, COVID-19 Vaccination Program for VHA Healthcare Personnel, outlines the policy and guidance for mandatory COVID-19 vaccination for Veterans Health Administration healthcare personnel is still in effect.

The mandate applies to EMS personnel, nurses, nursing assistants, physicians, technicians, therapists, phlebotomists, pharmacists, health professions trainees, clerical, dietary, environmental services, laundry, security, maintenance, engineering and facilities management, administrative, billing, and even volunteers.

If you want to volunteer at the VA, you better get a jab.

The COVID vax mandate is unnecessary. It hurts healthcare workers. I believe it hurts healthcare being provided to our veterans.

As of July 15, 2022, the VA had disciplined some 74 workers that we know of, some of whom were fired.

I do not believe the mandate is necessary to keep our veterans or the VA staff safe. The former CDC director has said that the vaccines can't do anything to prevent transmission.

This amendment is about ending COVID madness once and for all at the VA and making sure that anyone who wants to provide medical care to our great veterans can do so.

Madam Chair, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair, I rise in opposition to the gentleman's amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentlewoman from Florida is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair, I really can't believe I have to say this out loud, but vaccines have been essential in reducing the severity of COVID.

I would note that VA's vaccine requirement currently applies specifically to healthcare personnel, who are the people most in danger of not only contracting, but spreading this disease, especially to the vulnerable patients that VA serves, many of whom are at high risk for the long-term effects of COVID.

Additionally, at its highest point during the pandemic, VA had over 15,000 staff unable to work due to either infection or exposure, with over 9,000 of those clinical staff. That has a significant impact on patient care, and I think we should all agree that no veteran should be turned away from care because there wasn't a provider available to treat them.

VA took extremely reasonable steps to protect its patients and its workforce, and we shouldn't be tying VA's hands when it comes to managing their workforce and pursuing workplace safety and protecting its patients.

It was a responsible decision to limit the vaccine requirement to care providers in clinical settings, and this amendment, if it passes, will ensure that more VA employees get sick, more of their patients will get sick, and there is a certainty that more people will die if we don't ensure that VA employees who treat patients are vaccinated. That is just common sense and should be understood based on the experience of the time we all spent battling the pandemic.

Madam Chair, I urge my colleagues to oppose the amendment, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. ROY. Madam Chair, I would only respond to the gentlewoman from Florida when she said it only applies to healthcare personnel. I just rattled off an entire list of virtually every known possible human being and job that could apply at the VA, and a whole lot of them aren't, in fact, healthcare personnel.

I went through an entire list, including laundry, security, maintenance, engineering and facilities management, administrative, billing, even volunteers.

Instead, some of my colleagues have said, this doesn't apply to the VA. Like I said, we reached out to the VA and, sure enough, they replied today, yes, the vaccine mandate still applies.

Nevertheless, we get rid of the Medicaid. We get rid of the Medicare mandates. The private sector is out there. They can do what they want to do. The vaccine mandate has come and gone in terms of something that the American people believe we should tolerate.

They want to be able to move about without having the fear of losing their job, and we have people at the VA losing their job.

We have nurses that have given up their ability to practice. We have got it throughout our entire—we have members of our military that have been held up from being promoted and being able to advance. We have people at the VA. I have met with people who worked at the VA, some of whom who were facing losing their job. This should end. This madness should end.

That is what this amendment would do. It would ensure that no funding goes to continuing and perpetuating that mandate.

Madam Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair, I think it is important to point out that it is not just healthcare providers that work in VA healthcare facilities. Maintenance workers work in VA healthcare facilities and interact with patients and they move back and forth throughout the facility.

Cafeteria workers, other people who are not healthcare professionals work in VA facilities in and around the most sensitive patients being provided with care in the most intense healthcare environments. They can infect people with COVID. They can infect healthcare providers who work at the VA who interact with patients even more closely, and they can infect patients directly.

It is a responsible policy to ensure that where there is a severely ill patient or someone who is extremely vulnerable and has their immunity lowered—as a breast cancer survivor, I can tell you that when you go through chemotherapy, which I did not, but I have obviously spent a lot of time on understanding what breast cancer patients and people who go through chemotherapy experience, your immunity is knocked out.

So we are going to prohibit people who work in VA healthcare facilities from wearing masks to ensure that someone who has had their immunity system knocked out from being protected from an individual who might have COVID, while they are at work? That is grossly irresponsible, and it would result, potentially, in people getting sick and dying from something other than what they are being treated for at the VA.

□ 1645

That is the height of irresponsibility, and I can't believe that our friends on the other side of the aisle would be willing to risk the life and health of VA patients with this irresponsible policy.

We have to make sure in a healthcare setting that people who interact with patients in any way are protecting the patients from getting sick, and that is why this amendment should be defeated.

Madam Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. ROY).

The question was taken; and the Acting Chair announced that the ayes appeared to have it.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair, I demand a recorded vote.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, further proceedings on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Texas will be postponed.

AMENDMENT NO. 39 OFFERED BY MR. ROY

The Acting CHAIR. It is now in order to consider amendment No. 39 printed in House Report 118-158.

Mr. ROY. Madam Chair, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title) insert the following:

SEC. 419. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to modify or remove any display of the Department of Veterans Affairs that bears the mission statement "To fulfill President Lincoln's promise 'to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan' by serving and honoring the men and women who are America's veterans.'"

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 614, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. ROY) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. ROY. Madam Chair, I have an amendment that prohibits any of the MILCON-VA funding appropriated from being used to modify or remove any VA display of the original mission statement.

Now, just a quick second before I go there. I didn't reserve my time because I thought we were trying to move things along. I am going to say, as a cancer survivor, as someone who did have chemo, and as someone who was on Neulasta to deal with a weakened immune system, I was in a hospital, and I wasn't being forced to wear masks and wasn't being forced to take any shots. If I wanted to take the flu shot, I could.

We have a CDC Director who said that this vaccine doesn't do anything to help the spread from other people to you. That is the whole point.

We should get rid of the vaccine mandates, but on another note of craziness from this administration, on March 16, 2023, earlier this year, the VA announced it updated the 1959 mission statement from: "To fulfill President Lincoln's promise: 'To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and

for his widow, and his orphan' by serving and honoring the men and women who are America's veterans."

Now, it is a gender-neutral version: "To fulfill President Lincoln's promise to care for those who have served in our Nation's military and for their families, caregivers, and survivors."

That is, it upends the quote that is directly from President Lincoln.

The original mission statement is posted in roughly 50 percent of the VA's facilities. The VA has been working through replacing them over the last couple of months by a directive. It is unclear how many displays are left.

The Trump administration resisted calls to change the motto and put an additional 140 plaques at national cemeteries bearing Lincoln's quote because it is a good quote. It is a historic quote.

The fact is, we should not use taxpayer dollars to allow this administration to unilaterally change the VA's historic motto and erase the words of President Lincoln in order to appease the radical left in advancing yet another one of their cultural revisionist efforts.

The VA's mission statement, established in 1959, appropriately used the words of President Lincoln in his Second Inaugural Address delivered on March 4, 1865: "With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the Nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan."

That quote obviously came from the timeframe in which we were concluding the Civil War, and it came a mere month, from my recollection of history, from when Abraham Lincoln was, in fact, assassinated.

The speech was in part the basis of the Department of Veterans Affairs' creation and declared mission.

The Department wants to continue to waste hard-earned taxpayer dollars to erase history and expunge Lincoln's words by replacing the VA's mission statement, all in an attempt to earn woke brownie points.

I am thankful, of course, for the millions of men and women who have served valiantly in our Armed Forces, but changing the VA motto is just virtue signaling. We should be focused on providing the quality care and benefits veterans have earned in a timely manner.

The average wait time for new primary care appointments within the 13 South Texas Veterans Health System facilities was 50 days; veterans seeking their first appointment locally at the new Pecan Valley clinic, an average of 98 days; the VA clinic in the district I represent, Kerrville, 23 days, and that is the shortest.

This amendment, like my other amendments, is about restoring VA focus, not advancing a political agenda out of step with the majority of Americans.

Madam Chair, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair, I claim the time in opposition to the amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentlewoman from Florida is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair, in March of this year, VA announced it is updating its 1959 mission statement: "To fulfill President Lincoln's promise to care for those who have served in our Nation's military and for their families, caregivers, and survivors," and that was a way to make VA a more inclusive and inviting place.

VA's previous mission statement read: "To fulfill President Lincoln's promise: 'To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan.'"

The VA is a place where all veterans should feel welcomed, included, and cared for, and the previous mission statement did not adequately reflect the true veteran population. Only men were really reflected in the statement.

Today, women are the fastest growing group of veterans, and it is about time that we are reflected in VA's mission statement.

I am pleased the VA made this important and monumental change, honoring the past by making sure that we continue to make reference to President Lincoln's words and honoring the spirit of President Lincoln's intent, but also making sure that we truly honor all of our Nation's veterans, not just the men who have served our country.

Madam Chair, I urge my colleagues to oppose the amendment because this is exclusionary, and we want to make sure that the VA continues to be a more inclusive place and recognizes all veterans who serve, not just those who are men.

Madam Chair, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. ROY. Madam Chair, I will reiterate the extent to which this motto came directly from a quote from President Lincoln at his Second Inaugural Address at a particularly important and historic moment in our Nation's history. That was the point.

The literal culmination of the Civil War had occurred almost around that exact date or was occurring shortly thereafter and shortly before the President was to be assassinated, I believe in April, a month after this speech. To go back and edit this and then go around changing the VA to pull out a quote directly from Lincoln just, again, shows a lack of focus on what the VA should be focused on.

That is the point of the amendment. Can we just get back to trying to figure out how to provide care and do what we said we are going to do for millions of veterans who are tired of waiting and having technological systems that aren't working properly so they have trouble getting in and out of care and being able to use care in the

private sector? There are lots of things we need to be fixing at the VA, and this is certainly not one of them.

Madam Chair, I think that I have made the point. I think the amendment should be supported. I think we should get the VA focused on what the people of this country want us to focus on, supporting the care for veterans.

Madam Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair, I think it is important to point out that the new motto still is reflective of President Lincoln's beliefs, and his promise is one that was developed after surveying veterans who receive care from the VA and their employees.

Perhaps we should listen to the veterans who are served by the VA and the people who work with them every single day about the need for a more inclusive motto. The more inclusive motto says, "To fulfill President Lincoln's promise to care for those who have served in our Nation's military and for their families, caregivers, and survivors," making sure that the motto of the VA ensures that all patients who are served there, all employees who work there, all the surviving families who interact with the VA every single day understand that the motto applies to them and the more outdated motto that dates back to President Lincoln's time is no longer reflective of who is served at the VA.

This is 2023. It is hard to imagine that we are actually debating a motto on the floor of the House of Representatives and have a Member of Congress suggesting that that motto should remain exclusive of women instead of ensuring, as the motto voted on as a result of the surveys of VA employees and VA patients, is more reflective of who the VA treats today.

Madam Chair, I urge opposition to the gentleman's amendment, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. ROY).

The question was taken; and the Acting Chair announced that the ayes appeared to have it.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair, I demand a recorded vote.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, further proceedings on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Texas will be postponed.

AMENDMENT NO. 40 OFFERED BY MR. ROY

The Acting CHAIR. It is now in order to consider amendment No. 40 printed in House Report 118-158.

Mr. ROY. Madam Chair, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the short title) insert the following:

SEC. _____. None of the funds appropriated by this Act may be used to implement any of the following executive orders:

(1) Executive Order 13990, relating to Protecting Public Health and the Environment and Restoring Science To Tackle the Climate Crisis.

(2) Executive Order 14008, relating to Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad.

(3) Section 6 of Executive Order 14013, relating to Rebuilding and Enhancing Programs To Resettle Refugees and Planning for the Impact of Climate Change on Migration.

(4) Executive Order 14030, relating to Climate-Related Financial Risk.

(5) Executive Order 14057, relating to Catalyzing Clean Energy Industries and Jobs Through Federal Sustainability.

(6) Executive Order 14082, relating to Implementation of the Energy and Infrastructure Provisions of the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022.

(7) Executive Order 14096, relating to Revitalizing Our Nation's Commitment to Environmental Justice for All.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 614, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. ROY) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. ROY. Madam Chair, this amendment prohibits any of the funding in the MILCON-VA appropriations bill from being used to carry out President Biden's executive orders on climate change.

I was gratified to have offered a similar amendment and to see it adopted on the floor of the House with respect to the National Defense Authorization Act, the NDAA. We believe that the United States military should have a singular focus, and that is also true for the Veterans Administration. It should have a singular focus—ensuring our veterans have the care they need, not advancing the climate fetish that is making us beholden to China for our energy needs, undermining our national security, and undermining the very reason veterans put their lives on the line to defend this country.

In August 2021, the VA put forward a "climate action plan," which includes indoctrinating VA employees with so-called climate literacy, pushing renewable energy consumption, sustainable buildings, and greenhouse gas emissions at VA facilities.

Now, VA is transitioning its fleet of over 22,000 vehicles to zero-emission vehicles. Mind you, our American public, who want to go about carrying out their jobs and their livelihoods, can't even afford vehicles anymore because we are clamping down on the ability of them to go purchase vehicles because we are limiting the production of the internal combustion engine so we can have battery-powered automobiles that are being produced with lithium and cobalt and things being mined in Africa while children are being exploited and the Chinese Communist Party is being empowered, all while China, by the way, has 1,100 coal-fired plants compared to our 250. They are building two a week while we are basically doing nothing to advance anything with respect to reliable energy.

Instead, we are putting all of our eggs in the unreliable energy basket, which makes us beholden to China, the Chinese Communist Party, and our enemies around the globe rather than exporting liquefied natural gas and making us stronger.

Again, the Veterans Administration ought to reflect the American people and our strength by focusing on its core mission—providing healthcare and benefits that are necessary for those who have served to defend our country.

□ 1700

My Democratic colleagues apparently think you can power a VA hospital on wind and solar alone. Of course, you cannot. It is not possible.

Anybody who looks at it looks at the data and sees on a windless, cloudy day, how are you powering a VA hospital? You are powering it with fossil fuels. You are powering it with what little nuclear power we have, given that we have been unable to build a nuclear plant, by far the most reliable non-CO₂-producing energy in the world. We haven't been able to do it since the 1970s because of the regulatory infrastructure in this country. It is absurd.

My colleagues on the other side of the aisle go around ballyhooing about carbon dioxide, and the one reliable energy that you can do has been prevented by regulatory morass through the better part of my lifetime of 50 years.

Instead, they go around producing wind and solar, which as more information comes out about how horrific it has been for the planet, how horrific it is for children throughout this world mining those minerals, how empowering it is for our enemies, and here we are trying to turn the VA into essentially a promotion of the climate agenda for the radical left.

Madam Chair, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair, I claim the time in opposition.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentlewoman from Florida is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair, I rise in opposition to the gentleman's amendment.

Despite the wildfires, smoke-covered skies, life-threatening heat waves, and extreme weather we now face nearly every day in the United States, this amendment would hamstring our ability to address the accelerating threat of climate change.

The scientific consensus is clear, and we need to get serious about preventing further damage by transitioning to clean energy sources while also working to mitigate the costs we already bear today.

The Department of Defense has repeatedly recognized that climate change is a direct threat to the U.S. military's readiness, mission effectiveness, and resilience. From rising sea levels that can flood coastal installa-

tions to more frequent extreme weather events that can damage our military infrastructure, these climate-related effects put our security at risk.

Don't take my word for it. Just look at the news. Just yesterday, the news reported that the ocean temperature in south Florida was more than 100 degrees yesterday, 101.1 degrees to be specific, in Everglades National Park in Manatee Bay.

Do you know what happens at temperatures like that? At temperatures like that, we start seeing massive coral bleaching. Coral bleaching, high temperatures, sea level rise are not someday things in Florida. They are right now things.

In 2018, a Category 5 hurricane devastated Tyndall Air Force Base in Florida, necessitating billions of dollars to repair and rebuild. We can only mitigate against those costly scenarios if we can acknowledge that the changing climate and increasing extremes we must adapt to are real.

Further, climate change directly impacts the health of our most vulnerable veterans. Increases in extreme heat, extreme weather events, and disease pose a threat to those who have served, particularly those who are older or who have preexisting conditions and those who have respiratory conditions, which often older veterans do.

The policies targeted in this amendment provide a path to help us future-proof our military, incorporate climate risk analysis into military planning, enhance our energy security, address the health effects of climate change, and reduce our dependence on fossil fuels.

The gentleman from Texas might want to wish away or amend away global warming and climate change and its effects, but that simply isn't possible. This amendment would result in leaving our military woefully unprepared and our Nation on a path toward climate catastrophe in decades to come.

Madam Chair, I urge opposition to the amendment, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. ROY. Madam Chair, I just reiterate the extent to which we are turning over our national security to our enemies. Eighty percent of the solar panels installed in the United States come from Chinese firms. Seven of the top 10 wind technology turbine manufacturers are Chinese firms. China controls 77 percent of EV battery manufacturing.

The fact is, our national security is dependent upon our ability to produce and export liquefied natural gas and being able to use the God-given minerals that we have in this country, oil and gas, to be able to power the world.

There are almost a billion people on this planet who really have no access to electricity, some 3 billion who don't have access to reliable electricity and energy, and all we are doing is constraining the ability of the world to produce the energy necessary for human flourishing.

We are all committed to trying to help improve the environment. Governor DeSantis in Florida has made enormous strides in improving the Everglades in Florida and received notoriety for doing so.

In Texas, we have the most wind production of any State in the country, but you have to beg the question as to whether that is a good thing or a bad thing if you don't have enough fossil fuels to back up the wind and the solar.

My colleagues on the other side of the aisle want to live in unicorn land and pretend that you don't need energy to power up the buildings in which we live in order to make us able to exist on this planet and actually have human flourishing in the face of weather and the conditions that we have to live through.

Madam Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair, it is astonishing to me that our friends on the other side of the aisle are fossil fuel warriors. I mean, that is what this is all about. This is about Big Oil and fossil fuel supporters and making sure that the coffers continue to be filled.

It is absolutely irresponsible. It is essential that we make sure that we are preparing and aggressively pursuing and making sure that we can stave off and mitigate the effects of global warming and climate change. These are not risks that are somewhere in the distant future. They are happening right now.

Madam Chair, in my own district, in neighborhoods in south Florida, during the king tides in particular, you have sunny day flooding because the sea level rise is nearly unstoppable at this point. That is costing us precious resources that we should be spending on other quality-of-life issues. Yet, the gentleman's amendment would further prevent us from being able to mitigate the effects of global warming and climate change. It is dangerous.

In particular, as it relates to our military, it puts our national security at risk and the health of our servicemembers at risk. We need to make sure that we can continue to aggressively pursue protecting our national security interests, which is why, on both sides, no matter who is in charge of the Department of Defense, the Department continues to pursue policies that will ensure that we can mitigate against global warming and climate change. They understand the risk to our servicemembers and to our safety.

Madam Chair, I urge my colleagues to oppose this amendment, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. ROY).

The question was taken; and the Acting Chair announced that the ayes appeared to have it.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair, I demand a recorded vote.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, further proceedings on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Texas will be postponed.

AMENDMENT NO. 41 OFFERED BY MR. ZINKE

The Acting CHAIR. It is now in order to consider amendment No. 41 printed in House Report 118-158.

Mr. ZINKE. Madam Chair, I have an amendment at the desk.

The Acting CHAIR. The Clerk will designate the amendment.

The text of the amendment is as follows:

At the end of the bill (before the spending reduction account), insert the following:

SEC. _____. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to administer, implement, or enforce Executive Order 14057 (dated December 8, 2021).

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to House Resolution 614, the gentleman from Montana (Mr. ZINKE) and a Member opposed each will control 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Montana.

Mr. ZINKE. Madam Chair, I rise today to ask my colleagues to support my amendment to ensure the Department of Defense has the flexibility and authority to supply adequate power to defend this country and win in battle.

It is ironic that we are here today, and I can't believe we are talking about it, but we are. The latest rule by the Biden administration to force the DOD to only use electricity for power and heating without backup, without any regard to situation, terrain, technology, or supply chain, is absurd.

Let's talk about energy security and what it looks like. The first 2 years of the Trump administration, we went from 8.7 million barrels a day to 12.5 million barrels a day. We went from being energy vulnerable and dependent upon our allies and potential adversaries to being energy independent and, in some places, dominant.

By the way, we lowered emissions. Do you know why? Because America does energy better, cleaner, and more efficient than any other country on the face of this planet.

Let's talk about the Biden administration and what this does. It puts our national security at risk.

First, let's talk about supply chains. In the EV world, where are the minerals mined? Who controls the minerals, the processing, the manufacturing? Who controls the solar cells, the components that make up the EV world? China.

It is ironic that the moment we become energy independent, we are now moving to more dependency on our allies and what could be our adversaries.

Secondly, let's look at the cost. How much does it cost in the world we live in? We are looking at budgets and savings and the future. What this does is it raises the cost of construction, and there is no answer to the supply chain. Just on mining critical minerals alone, it would take a 2,000 percent increase

for 20 years to meet the energy demands of batteries today. Yet, this administration puts this rule in, and by the way, good luck mining in the United States. The only thing this administration is approving is gravel pits.

Let's talk about the environment and disposal. Where do 90 percent of the solar cells go today? To landfills across this great Nation. How about the turbine blades? How about the batteries? Where are the batteries going? How do we remove the toxins? Do you know what? There is no answer. There is no answer for the supply chain in the processing and manufacturing, and there is no answer for the disposal.

Madam Chair, I agree with the gentlewoman from Florida that our oceans are precious, absolutely precious. Ninety percent of the plastics in the ocean come from four rivers in China. I can go over a list of the environmental atrocities in China.

Madam Chair, I ask my colleagues to vote for America, vote for American energy, and stop this absurdity that is going to cost lives because we won't be able to power this country.

Do you think we are having problems now? Ask the United States Navy, which had to pull the fleet out of San Diego. Do you know why? They don't have shore power because the grid is not set up for it. We are dangerously moving toward vulnerability.

Madam Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair, I claim the time in opposition to this amendment.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentlewoman from Florida is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair, this executive order is a whole-of-government approach for addressing climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and transitioning to clean energy and sustainable technologies. It ensures that we set responsible targets for how we invest our Federal dollars to incentivize the private sector to expand on these technologies, and it creates unionized jobs.

We cannot turn a blind eye to the extreme heat, flooding, and wildfires across this Nation. We are seeing the impacts of climate change in real time.

In south Florida, like I mentioned earlier, yesterday, we had a 101.1-degree registered temperature in the ocean around south Florida.

From California to Vermont and across Republican and Democratic districts, if we want to leave our planet better for our children and our grandchildren, then we must strategically invest in products that improve energy and water efficiency, reduce emissions, and generate clean energy.

We need a coordinated, government-wide approach to ensure that there is no duplication of effort or unnecessary red tape that disincentivizes public-private partnerships. This amendment prevents that.

The focus on elevating fossil fuels and thwarting the advancement of clean energy will not help this Nation build a strong economy for the future.

Madam Chair, I urge my colleagues to defeat the amendment, and I reserve the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The gentlewoman has the only time remaining.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair, at the appropriate time, I will offer a motion to recommit this bill back to committee. If the House rules permitted, I would have offered the motion with an important amendment to this bill.

My amendment strikes section 258, which prohibits funding for abortions and the implementation of the VA's interim final rule on access to reproductive healthcare. My Republican colleagues want to make abortion illegal nationwide.

□ 1715

Section 258 of this bill furthers that mission, putting women at risk and making it harder for veterans to access healthcare. Let's ensure that doesn't happen.

Madam Chair, I include in the RECORD the text of my amendment.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ of Florida moves to recommit the bill H.R. 4366 to the Committee on Appropriations with the following amendment:

Strike section 258.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair, I hope my colleagues will join me in voting for the motion to recommit, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Montana (Mr. ZINKE).

The question was taken; and the Acting Chair announced that the ayes appeared to have it.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair, I demand a recorded vote.

The Acting CHAIR. Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, further proceedings on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Montana will be postponed.

Mr. CARTER of Texas. Madam Chair, I move that the Committee do now rise.

The motion was agreed to.

Accordingly, the Committee rose; and the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. ZINKE) having assumed the chair, Mrs. MILLER of West Virginia, Acting Chair of the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union, reported that that Committee, having had under consideration the bill (H.R. 4366) making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2024, and for other purposes, had come to no resolution thereon.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair